NATIONAL
SURVIVOR
NETWORK

CARE,
SELF–DETERMINATION,
AND SAFETY

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED,
PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH
TO PREVENTING
HUMAN TRAFFICKING

January, 2023
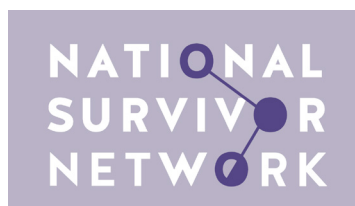
nationalsurvivornetwork.org | survivorleadership@castla.org

Contents

How to use this resource

In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis in the anti-human trafficking sector on the value of public health and rights-based approaches to addressing human trafficking. A "public health" approach can be applied to both response and prevention. Public health interventions aim to treat the impacts of human trafficking on individuals, families, communities, and systems. Many of these approaches include ensuring appropriate medical and mental health care for survivors, and strengthening healthcare systems' ability to care for and assist survivors. A public health approach to violence prevention is an effective way of ending violence by focusing on the "health, safety, and well-being of entire population," rather than a focus on individual instances of violence and punishment for crime.

Human trafficking is a *criminal legal* concept that sits at the intersections of several different forms of violence, which has led to "prevention" approaches that emphasize law enforcement and prosecution instead of structural community resources ("social safety nets") and policy changes that promote public wellness. This means that many anti-trafficking professionals have typically used a *crime prevention* approach. When these professionals hope to learn and integrate a *violence prevention* approach, they may struggle to understand and implement the public health framework.

Public health violence primary prevention strategies look at violence like any other health issue or epidemic: What are the root causes? What is the context in which this health issue happens? How can we decrease the statistical risk of this health issue happening?

This resource is meant to be an introduction to the public health approach to violence prevention, and how to apply that to the prevention of human trafficking. The information in this resource is outlined through the social-ecological model, which is an essential public health model for understanding the risk of violence. In the social-ecological model, risk factors *increase* the likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing violence, and protective factors *decrease* the likelihood of someone perpetrating or experiencing violence. Risk and protective factors do not cause someone to perpetrate or experience violence. Instead, they are correlated to an increase or decrease. For example, witnessing violence does not cause someone to bully others and not all people who have witnessed violence will bully others. However, people who bully others are statistically more likely to have witnessed violence than the general population. This then informs how we understand prevention: If we can prevent the initial violence and provide adequate supports for trauma recovery for children who have witnessed violence, we can prevent bullying.

In the social-ecological model, risk and protective factors exist at multiple levels: individual, relationship, community, and society.[1] Factors can be either risk or protective, and can exist at different levels. To use the example of bullying, these might include:

Level	Factor	Risk or Protective?
Individual[2]	Witnessing violence	Risk factor
Interpersonal	Supportive and re-sourced school staff	Protective factor
Community	Community violence	Risk factor
Society	Income inequality	Risk Factor

To prevent bullying effectively, we would want to *decrease* risk factors and *increase* protective factors at *every level*. While these are the levels used by public health institutions for these specific risk and protective factors, each level of risk or protection influences the others. For example, people living in environments where violent conflict is present, such as domestic violence (a relationship-level factor), are statistically more likely to witness violence (an individual-level factor).

Risk and protective factors are often shared between multiple forms of violence. In public health, we call this the "shared risk and protective factors" framework. Since many of the risk and protective factors for one form of violence are often the same risk and protective factors for other forms of violence, when we reduce these shared risk factors, we are *preventing multiple forms of violence at once*. When thinking of how to prevent human trafficking, it is important to remember that human trafficking is a *criminal* definition that sits at the intersections of multiple forms of violence: when we reduce the risk and protective factors for the forms of violence that are often involved in human trafficking (such as sexual violence, partner violence, economic abuse, labor exploitation, and racism, for example), we can prevent human trafficking.

The social-ecological model is a way public health experts understand how violence, injuries, and harm occur. Without understanding the social-ecological model, people might focus too much on an individual's perceived or actual choices instead of noticing the context in which trafficking happens. This can lead to unintentional victim-blaming when we ignore the role of communities and societies in creating the conditions for harm or illness. We use the social-ecological model

to organize this resource to demonstrate the ways the societal and community level drivers of human trafficking combine on the individual and interpersonal level to increase vulnerability. For human trafficking, this means acknowledging the role of drivers such as poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and misogyny in perpetuating human trafficking.

A simplified version of the social-ecological model

By "drivers" of human trafficking, we are pointing to conditions that exist across these levels in our society that allow human trafficking to occur and increase. These drivers are often functioning within our social, governmental, and community support models rather than happening as an exception to them, which means that systems advocacy must be a key component of any comprehensive and effective prevention plan. **For each driver we explain, we will also share corresponding opportunities to create meaningful change to end human trafficking.**

This resource aims to move away from a criminal legal approach to trafficking, which focuses solely on the arrest and prosecution of traffickers. Some people refer to this as the "criminal justice system," but for many people, these systems (policing, courts, and criminalization) are sources of trauma rather than justice. For this reason, we are using the term used by many racial justice organizers: "criminal legal system." This system often criminalizes survivors and disproportionately targets Black, Indigenous, and people of color, two-spirit or LGBTQ+ people, and immigrants. A singular focus on the criminal legal system as The Solution™ to trafficking reduces awareness, understanding, and implementation of preventive

strategies and transformative resources which would provide survivors with socioeconomic stability and comprehensive trauma recovery. Instead of advocating for the expansion of this system, this resource offers concrete steps for the healthcare, public health, and advocacy fields to support people at every level of intervention. By drawing on existing promising practices, we can foster true agency in decision-making and prevent exploitation from happening in the first place.

This resource seeks to challenge some of the common narratives that exist about human trafficking and traditional approaches to its prevention, which emerged out of a limited, historical understanding of what exploitation is and how it happens. The current, dominant framework for addressing human trafficking emphasizes individual risk factors and focuses on trafficking in the sex trades at the expense of neglecting efforts to end *all* forms of forced labor. This either-or framing disregards the sexual abuse and assault experienced by people being trafficked in non-sexual forms of labor, and the frequency with which victims of trafficking in the sex trades also are trafficked for other forms of labor. Different kinds of sexual abuse or exploitation happen to people who are trafficked in sectors that are not the sex trades, and "sex trafficking" and "labor trafficking" are not mutually exclusive.

The anti-violence and public health fields must transform our anti-trafficking efforts to ensure they truly meet the needs of people at the highest risk of experiencing harm. The resources and perspectives presented throughout this document aim to shift the framework into one that ends all forms of labor exploitation more broadly through societal changes that promote health and economic justice. This resource builds on a growing body of anti-violence work rooted in a commitment to constant learning, openness to change and self-reflection, with an understanding that there is not always a right or perfect answer. This is because people who are trafficked are not all the same in their experiences, and may require different kinds of supports, services, or policies from the public health sector and anti-trafficking movement.

What needs to change at societal and institutional levels to ensure care, self-determination, and safety for survivors?

This resource includes trafficking of adults in the sex trades under the umbrella of labor trafficking. In our current laws, there are separate definitions for human trafficking in commercial sex and other forms of labor because of the perceived morality of adults engaging in the sex trades. This has made it hard to know how prevalent human trafficking is and has taken focus away from the structural forces that create the environment for exploitation of all types. We refer to commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking of minors throughout this document under the umbrella of child abuse or maltreatment in order to align our efforts with those addressing the root causes of these forms of violence.

While this resource refers throughout to trafficking in all forms of labor, we offer detailed guidance for reframing the public health and policy approach to trafficking in the sex trades. This emphasis is partly because the federal definition of trafficking in the sex trades is separate and different from the federal definition of trafficking in other forms of labor, and includes an exception in which all engagement in commercial sex by minors is trafficking. It is also partly because some advocates, activists, and politicians have intentionally confused and misrepresented the language used to describe trafficking in order to: 1) create harmful rhetoric around consensual adult sexual labor; 2) present trafficking in a way that creates and maintains a moral panic; and 3) criminalize or penalize sex workers. Please know that our emphasis on correcting this misinformation does not represent a

National Survivor Network

belief that trafficking in the sex trades is more significant or important to address than any form of forced labor or child exploitation, but rather reflects a need to clarify existing confusion. The National Survivor Network acknowledges that "all human trafficking exploits an individual's body and mind, and that trafficking in the sex trades is not inherently more traumatic, grievous, or important to address than trafficking in other forms of labor, as different experiences of trauma cannot be compared or measured."[3]

The selected resources linked come from people and organizations who have done a lot of deep and difficult thinking to put forward these ideas. Many are focused on issues that are not explicitly addressing trafficking and exploitation; however, they do address the root causes of the issue through a health justice lens.[4] The anti-trafficking resources highlighted reflect many of the public health values and principles of bodily autonomy and self-determination that are held in the anti-trafficking field. There may be some discrepancies between the views in this resource and that of the organizations cited. The anti-trafficking field is broad and spans many disciplines– this resource pulls together information that supports primary prevention on a systemic level, which requires listening to, learning from, and unlearning alongside survivors of all forms of human trafficking, as well as people with lived experience across the spectrum of agency in the sex trades and other forms of precarious, informal, criminalized, undervalued, or stigmatized labor.

A public health definition of human trafficking

Human trafficking is not a distinct form of violence but is rather a criminal legal concept that sits at the intersections of other forms of violence, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, teen dating violence, economic coercion, labor exploitation, child maltreatment, the inherently violent systems of poverty, and youth violence. When someone experiences labor that is compelled through force, fraud, or coercion (or involvement of a minor in commercial sex), that is the criminal definition of "human trafficking," which almost always happens alongside these other forms of violence. Because human trafficking involves multiple forms of violence, a comprehensive public health framework for understanding human trafficking will incorporate best practices from other public health violence prevention efforts in the intersecting forms of violence. Violence is a health issue that can be addressed with a public health approach. Therefore, for the purposes of this resource, the term **human trafficking refers to the intersecting experiences of violence in the context of labor by force, fraud, or coercion or commercial sexual exploitation of a minor.**

Human trafficking includes but is not limited to, the following: coercing another person to engage in sexual acts or other forms of labor for something of value (money, housing, drugs, etc.), deceiving or forcing another person or persons into performing sexual or other forms of labor under the conditions of "abuse, extensive hours, poor pay, extortionate debt, physical confinement, serious occupational hazards, violence, and threats."[5]

There are forms of labor exploitation that do not fall under the federal definition of trafficking, because laws do not reflect all forms of violence, such as prison labor and wage theft (see 'A Closer Look: Wage Theft). With a public health approach, we can expand our understanding of exploitation to include people impacted by policy failures and systems causing harm, even if it is technically "legal." When the goal is primary prevention and harm reduction, rather than criminalization, we can recognize how people make decisions based on the tools they have and we can work towards collaborative responses that respect individual and collective autonomy. These collaborative approaches yield more sustainable and accessible solutions that can be more easily adapted for people's unique, individual needs.

A Closer Look: Wage Theft

Wage theft, or the failure to pay employees the agreed-upon or legally required wages, are violations of federal and state laws with detrimental impacts for workers.[6] Wage theft can include failure to: 1) pay the minimum wage or the agreed upon wage; 2) pay time and a half for overtime hours; 3) pay tips earned; or 4) failure to properly pay workers based upon misclassifying them either as exempt from wage and hour laws or as independent contractors.

Workers may be unaware of federal and state criminal or civil penalties for wage theft (like minimum wage laws and protection against retaliation). Due to a lack of awareness about wage theft laws, workers may assume they have little to no recourse for wage theft, and exploitative employers rely on these assumptions to carry out their exploitative practices. Even when there is awareness about wage theft laws and worker rights to compensation, there are still barriers to legal options.

Filing a wage theft claim can be a challenging process that places increased burdens on survivors looking to assert their legal right to monetary damages. For example, a survivor is responsible for coordinating their own legal support when filing a wage theft claim and, unfortunately, there are not enough nonprofits that can provide the necessary legal representation for wage theft claims. If a survivor is unable to obtain legal support, they have to navigate the process of filing a wage theft claim on their own, which can be difficult and require a significant amount of skill and time.

Another major obstacle to pursuing a wage theft claim is the relatively short statute of limitations, or deadline, for bringing legal action. Often workers may not know their legal rights or when those rights have been violated, or may hesitate to file claims for fear of retaliation. Employers might also string workers along claiming they do not have the money on hand but promising to pay them later. When the workers fail to assert their rights on time, they are left without recourse and unable to recover the back wages and damages they are rightfully owed.

As a result of ongoing limitations with wage theft laws and their enforcement, it is important to address the issue using a comprehensive public health approach to human trafficking that *prevents* exploitation. A comprehensive, public health approach to human trafficking will support worker-led organizing and "know your rights" education campaigns to help workers negotiate with their employers before entering into exploitative contracts as well as awareness and advocacy of wage theft laws that impact workers' rights. Public health approaches also include advocating for strengthening wage theft laws and enforcement of them to ensure workers' rights are protected through more effective regulation of businesses and employers.

See the Winning Wage Justice report for more on policies and practices for fighting wage theft. Thank you to Nagwa Ibrahim and Erika Gonzales for review of this section.

National Survivor Network

Why this public health framing of exploitation?

Because of the many impacts of exploitation on individual and community health, it is essential that public health continues to advance efforts to address these intersecting forms of violence and exploitation in a trauma-informed and survivor-centered way.[7] By shifting away from a criminal legal framework focused on how exploitation happens on an individual level, we can adopt a holistic public health framework that focuses on the root causes and prevents violence and exploitation from happening in the first place. Marginalized populations are often blamed for exploitation even though they often have unequal access to safety and resources due to discrimination and historical trauma.

Like all systems, public health systems have historically participated in perpetuating and reinforcing oppressive stereotypes and practices. However, the growing movement for health equity as a public health priority has allowed for the development of public health approaches that address community wellness with an anti-oppression framework. This shift in how exploitation is viewed redirects our focus from victim-blaming narratives to a broader understanding of human trafficking.

Public health approaches involve key members of the community in prevention and work toward decreasing the long-term impacts of labor exploitation. We do this by engaging healthcare providers and public health professionals as supporters and advocates, as well as by working *with* rather than *for* impacted communities. In order to meaningfully involve people with higher statistical risk of trafficking-related violence, it is important that public health professionals understand the ways criminalization can escalate vulnerability to violence. This is true for many people from marginalized communities, including people in the sex trades. For example, one study found that 70% of sex workers had never disclosed their work to a healthcare professional due in part to fear healthcare providers will call the police.[8] Similarly, migrant-hired farmworkers have barriers to accessing healthcare, and undocumented status reduces the likelihood that they will seek medical care.

More information about emerging public health and rights approaches to preventing violence:

Community Safety Realized: Public Health Pathways to Preventing Violence

The Groundwater Approach — Racial Equity Institute

A Human Rights-based Approach to Address Human Trafficking

The Language We Use

Language is always shifting as we find more inclusive and accurate ways to describe experiences, identities, and political struggles.

⇨ "Modern-day slavery" is frequently used by the U.S. anti-trafficking movement to increase public support of the issue by comparing all human trafficking to slavery. Casual use of this term ignores the basic differences between historical slavery and modern human trafficking. For example, chattel slavery was a legal and government-supported economic system, while human trafficking is not. Current anti-trafficking organizations are frequently funded by government entities. Chattel slavery was based on race, and children of enslaved individuals were considered the property of the slaveholder. Human trafficking and other forms of abuse in some communities (particularly Indigenous communities) are often generational. While generational violence results from the lasting intergenerational trauma of colonial violence (such as residential schools), it is not codified into law in the way that chattel slavery was. In the United States, the only form of "modern-day slavery" that is legal and state-sanctioned is forced prison labor, which is allowed by the thirteenth amendment.

Survivors of human trafficking come from many different racial and ethnic groups. Someone's race is not itself a risk factor, but due to the systemic inequities Black, Indigenous, Immigrant, and LGBTQ+ people face, these groups are targeted at the highest rates.[9] It is important to note that the use of the term "modern-day slavery" is common in global anti-trafficking work. While other countries have their own dialogue about the appropriate use of this term, it is best to be cautious with use of this word in the United States context.

⇨ Many in the current sex workers' rights movement view the term "prostitution" as stigmatizing and legal-system oriented, particularly when used by people who do not have lived experience. While some individuals may reclaim words that have traditionally been weaponized against them, advocates should avoid using these terms if you are not part of the impacted group. Likewise, people with lived experience are not a monolith and will not all agree on language and terminology. Alternatively, "sex work" describes any sexual service *consensually* exchanged for money or any other kind of payment, both legal and illicit. "Sex trades" includes anyone involved in commercial sex across the spectrum of agency, whether they are there by choice, circumstance, or trafficking. "Sex trades" includes different forms of sexual labor such as escort services, street-level sex work, pornography, exotic dancing, massage, internet work, and phone

sex. The sex trades also include third-party support such as market facilitators, transportation, managers, bartenders, peer support, etc. Legal definitions typically criminalize third parties in full-service sex trading under charges of "facilitation of prostitution." These roles are sometimes sources of support for people working in the sex trades, but are considered traffickers in cases where force, fraud, coercion, and/or minors are involved.

⇨   Our current federal legislation has separate definitions for "sex trafficking" and "labor trafficking" – language which was developed as a compromise between advocates against all forms of forced labor and advocates against all forms of sex work.[10] This contributes to the ongoing conflation of sex work and human trafficking, leading to reduced survivor agency and engagement.[11] Many advocates feel that this language also dismisses the physical, emotional, and administrative labor that can be involved in the sex trades, and others note the ways this focus disregards the range of exploitation inherent in all capitalist labor.[12] As a way of acknowledging the labor involved in commercial sex, we will often use "trafficking in the sex trades" or "trafficking in commercial sex or other forms of labor" for clarity of language.

Learn More:

Human Trafficking, Chattel Slavery, and Structural Racism: What Journalists Need to Know

The Takeaway's Deep Dive with Dorian Warren: Sex Work

Erased: The Impact of FOSTA-SESTA

Reconsidering the Use of the Terminology 'Modern Day Slavery'

Don't call it 'sex trafficking'

'Sex Trafficking' as Epistemic Violence

The criminal legal approach: Survivor centered?

The criminal legal system is structured to perpetuate itself rather than prevent violence, including human trafficking, from happening in the first place. A recent study found human trafficking law enforcement personnels' primary focus was on ensuring prosecution and making sure the victim is willing to serve as a witness.[13] According to the experiences of attorneys and social service providers interviewed for that study, the tactics used by law enforcement are not inherently premised on the needs of trafficked people.[14] Raids on the sex trades or other places that may employ migrant workers are a common law enforcement tactic used ostensibly to combat human trafficking but have been described by survivors as "traumatic, lacking procedures to identify trafficked persons, and [lacking] ... follow through by law enforcement on assistance to trafficked persons," and often lead to the further criminalization or deportation of survivors and their fear of accessing systems.[15] Law enforcement have typically conducted raids or stings on the sex trades without having specific evidence of human trafficking, sometimes arresting people "for their own good" or as a means of outreach. This practice of framing prostitution stings as anti-trafficking operations has been so harmful and ineffective - yet widespread - that the 2022 Office for Victims of Crime's funding announcement for enhanced collaborative task forces clarified that government funds may not be used to target "the purchasers of commercial sex that fail to result in the identification of one or more actual victims of human trafficking *prior to an operation* OR otherwise fail to involve a connection to one or more actual trafficking victims" (emphasis added).[16]

A criminal legal approach to human trafficking measures success by prosecuting traffickers and sex buyers and "rescuing" survivors or coercively facilitating their exit, regardless of how the survivor defines their own safety and success. This hyper-focus on rescue does not acknowledge the healing power of an organization honoring a survivor's autonomy, agency, and self-determination through resources and support. It also very often fails to protect survivors from future violence such as the risk of being trafficked again, whether by the same trafficker(s) or someone new. Additionally, coercive interventions may create an environment of fear where survivors will

be even more hesitant to reach out for help of any kind in the future. Research overwhelmingly suggests that criminalization of the sex trades increases the risk of violence and negatively impacts physical and mental health.[17] Legislation intended to curb trafficking, such as the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act/Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (SESTA/FOSTA), has been associated with negative consequences for sex workers' safety– including physical exploitation.[18,19] Research also shows that criminalization of the sex trades is associated with increased police violence– including sexual violence and extortion.[20] One example of this, provided by a study led by the Department of Justice, found that police officers in Baltimore were forcing sex workers to perform sexual acts to avoid arrest.[21] Another study in Baltimore found that encounters with police, including non-abusive enforcement, contribute to a climate that increases client abuse of street-based sex workers.[22] The study concurs with the current evidence that decriminalization of sex work offers the most effective structural change and policy priorities should focus on increasing safety for people in the sex trades.[23]

Criminalization of sex work increases the risk of violence and negatively impacts physical and mental health

Ending criminalization of sex work does not mean that trafficking in the sex trades goes unaddressed. With clear differentiation between trafficked and consensual engagement in the sex trades, resources and efforts could be focused on addressing force, fraud, coercion, and exploitation generally, and exploitation of minors in all forms of income-production. This promotes favorable results for everyone by reducing opportunities for both exploitation and state violence. It reduces the stigma associated with commercial sex – stigma that often prevents sex workers *and* trafficking victims from seeking assistance or receiving nonjudgmental care. It allows for meaningful research into risk and protective factors for perpetration of human trafficking at all levels of the social-ecological model. It allows us to take a whole community approach to economic and social justice. A whole community approach provides all people in communities with meaningful options that do not rely on doing labor you do not want to do or exploiting others to build your own security.

For more information about research findings related to criminalization of the sex trade, see this ACLU research brief: Is Sex

Work Decriminalization the Answer? What the Research Tells Us

Prioritizing a criminal legal approach over a public health approach also impacts how law enforcement engage with survivors of human trafficking. For law enforcement, the officer's perception of victimhood is often based on willingness to cooperate with an investigation, willingness to identify a trafficker or third party, and whether the person has a criminal history.[24] This dynamic is also true with trafficking in other forms of labor, legal and criminalized. Specific to the sex trades, many people who have left the sex trades have reported that they felt both trapped and simultaneously able to act with agency– perhaps due to adaptive decision-making with limited options. Previous criminal convictions not only shape whether people in the sex trades are viewed as victims or criminals– convictions also create significant barriers that keep people from finding employment and housing, adding additional limits to the choices available to the survivor and putting them at risk of further or continued exploitation.[25] Research suggests that this kind of limited choice is consistent with youth experiences in the sex trades– youth under 18 have limited options for making livable wages, accessing stable housing, and accessing health care that does not require parental/guardian support or child welfare involvement.[26] Some theorists refer to this process of making the best decisions we can out of the options that are practically and culturally available to us as "bounded agency." All people's agency is limited (or bounded) by their resources, communities, and cultures.

The criminalization of sex work impacts survivors of trafficking in the sex trades. Stigma created by criminalization can lead to survivors losing housing, career options, and child custody, even if their experiences were coerced or in the past. Additionally, trafficking survivors are frequently arrested in law enforcement operations, leading to a variety of efforts to create "safe harbor laws." Safe harbor laws are intended to prevent trafficking survivors from being criminalized for their trafficking experiences. However, they are often limited either to youth, to trafficking in the sex trades, or to a limited number or type of charges. In reality, sex trading is not the only criminalized economy people are trafficked into. There is a growing awareness in the anti-trafficking sector that survivors may experience "forced criminality" as part of their trafficking. This may include trafficked labor that is related to immigration, sex work, drugs, theft/shoplifting, fraud, smuggling, recruitment, or even homicide. Like all other forms of labor, forced criminality is increased when

people's basic needs are not met or when their rights are violated through structural violence, unchecked capitalism, or state violence. Safe harbor, vacatur, expungement, and immigration relief laws for survivors must address a broad variety of charges and kinds of trafficking in order to be meaningful for survivors.

Lastly, criminalization and coerced engagement with the criminal legal system may also have impacts on survivors in legal trades (such as those who are currently gig workers, activists, or people consensually engaging in legal forms of commercial sex) when their access to banking, payment apps, and credit card processing is impeded.[27]

Spectrums of choice, circumstance, and coercion

Labor in the United States exists along a spectrum from choice to circumstance to coercion. Some experts refer to this as the "spectrum of agency." The spectrum of agency acknowledges that peoples' options and choices about what kinds of work they do are largely influenced by circumstances, and that discerning the level of agency they have is not always straightforward.

Work by force, fraud, or coercion is human trafficking.

Work by enthusiastic choice, that is *freely chosen*, is a privilege that is not experienced by many under the current models of capitalism.

Work by circumstance is when someone does work they do not want to be doing because they do not have better options. This is reflected by the sentiment, "I would leave this work if I had better options," and this is the situation in which many people in the United States find themselves. Work by circumstance may sound like:

⇨   "I do this work which I don't enjoy because I have to pay my bills or feed my family."

⇨   "I do this work which I don't want to do because it pays well and I couldn't make this much in a different field."

⇨   "I do this work which pays horribly because of disability and other work options available to me don't accommodate my needs or limitations."

⇨   "I do this work that brings significant risks of devastating health impacts because that is the only industry that pays well in my region."

⇨   "I do this work that contradicts my values because I can't get hired in a job that aligns with my values."

⇨   "I do this work I hate because my criminal record prevents the kinds of employment I would like to do."

⇨   "I do this work that is scary because I lost my stable housing and can't find work in many other fields because they require a permanent address."

These are just a few of the emotionally challenging and often physically impactful realities people face in many forms of labor, but often work by circumstance in criminalized industries (like the sex trades) is subject to stigma, religious shame, or treated as an exception to other forms of work. Digging deeper into how these kinds of situations happen in so many forms of labor helps recognize the interconnectedness of all forms of exploitation. Racism, xenophobia, poverty, ableism, and other factors all contribute to these dynamics. We reduce the number of people trapped in these situations when we increase options through systemic change, anti-oppression work, stronger safety nets, and more equitable compensation for workers.

Just like in all forms of labor, people in the sex trades have a diverse array of experiences, identities, and factors that contribute to their involvement, and their experiences and participation in the sex trades may fluctuate. Regardless of whether someone is engaged in the sex trades because the work affords flexibility and entrepreneurship, trading sex to meet basic needs based on their circumstance, or experiencing human trafficking in the sex trades (which is sexual violence), **everyone in the sex trades deserves care, self-determination, and safety.**

> "Addressing trafficking more effectively requires a clearer understanding of the underlying issues. Human trafficking is not the result of a few criminals who have managed to avoid prosecution. It is a systemic problem, with roots in the violation of labor rights."- Tomoko Nishimoto, International Labour Organization (ILO)

Failures of Current Approaches

Many of the current tools and strategies offered to address trafficking fall short or impair trust between providers and their patients/clients. These harmful strategies often leave the individual or survivor out of the dialogue, limiting their agency and failing to center their voices.

Relying on Trafficking "Red Flags"

Providers are often trained to notice certain criteria in order to identify trafficking victims, including tattoos, carrying condoms, appearing "fearful" or "paranoid," deferring to another person before speaking, dressing "sexy," and/or missing documentation. While these things may be common among people experiencing certain kinds of trafficking, they also can be indistinguishable from other life experiences or demographics. We may see similar behaviors among people with limited English proficiency, housing-insecure people, people living in poverty, those with mental health conditions, sex workers, queer and transgender people, neurodivergent individuals, and more. Relying solely or uncritically on vague identifiers has unintended consequences, such as making false determinations of trafficking based on a biased profile, discouraging carrying condoms for fear of being "flagged" as either a sex worker or victim of trafficking, or discouraging people from seeking out services. When people fear being swept into an anti-trafficking "machine" they do not believe will address their needs or respect their autonomy, or that it may put them in contact with carceral systems, they may be less likely to seek help for other needs they may have.

Many of these "red flags" are also based on racist stereotypes and colorism. These kinds of "red flags" have been harmful to those in interracial relationships or in mixed-race or adoptive children, such as when people falsely accuse someone's significant other or friend or parent or relative or guardian of trafficking based solely on racist stereotypes. Many of these "red flags" may be intertwined with anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric about "grooming" and perceived sexual morality. Relying on "red flags" also disregards the levels of labor exploitation and economic coercion that are normalized throughout the country's workforce. The normalization of legal but exploitative practices creates the conditions for trafficking to flourish, and this is not resolved by better recognizing only the most egregious forms of unethical labor practices. Furthermore, relying solely on "red flags" and surface level understanding of human trafficking will leave many survivors who do not meet these biased criteria without support.

Non-Consensual Law Enforcement Involvement

Healthcare and other service providers, in efforts to support people whom they know or suspect are experiencing violence and exploitation, may feel compelled to involve law enforcement without the consent of the potential survivor. In a few states, there may even be mandatory reporting requirements for trafficking or other intersecting forms of violence, even for adults. The forms of immigration relief that are available to undocumented survivors of exploitation and violence often mandate cooperation with law enforcement, even at risk of harm to the survivor or their family. Non-consensual involvement of law enforcement has been associated with harmful safety and health outcomes and erodes trust in healthcare and other services as viable resources for people experiencing human trafficking, particularly those ho are undocumented, BIPOC, LGBTQ, living in poverty, or in a criminalized economy..[28] For clinical strategies that build on or move beyond these limited approaches, see the "Opportunity: Connection and care" section in this resource.

Mandatory "Treatment"

Often presented as a more trauma-informed approach to criminalizing potential victims, Human Trafficking Intervention Courts (HTICs) order mandatory "treatment" instead of traditional incarceration punishments for people picked up on prostitution charges. In this model, people engaged in the sex trades are viewed as victims regardless of whether or not the person was being trafficked. Services offered emphasize connection with other program members and trauma treatment and may include connection to benefits and practical assistance. The defendants' actual needs are not formally assessed before services are mandated in court, and there is not a process in place to ensure that the specific service provider to which a defendant is mandated is capable of meeting their needs.[29] Even its advocates note that "mandated therapy is neither inherently nor inevitably beneficial to defendants," and judges often threaten defendants with incarceration in order to coerce them into a treatment-based sentence.[30] Additionally, HTICs create the perception that arrests for prostitution benefit defendants by connecting them to needed resources. Research has shown that when diversion courts are established, arrests rise both to "connect" individuals to social services as well as to "fill open slots" in programs.[31] These programs frequently retraumatize survivors by relying on the same dynamics of coercion, helplessness, and denial of agency that were the defining features of their prior abuse. This also creates ethical dilemmas for social workers and therapists by putting them into situations where they are expected to provide "trauma treatment" in the context of an inherently coercive and traumatic relationship for the client.[32]

What About Youth and Trafficking in the Sex Trades?

Legal definitions of trafficking in all forms of labor except for commercial sex are the same for youth and for adults. Legal definitions of trafficking in the sex trades designate all youth under the age of 18 as victims, regardless of whether force or explicit coercion is present, whereas laws for adults get more complicated regarding perceived victimhood versus criminality – a dynamic that often overlooks the exploitative dynamics leveraged to draw youth into other criminalized economies. For example, youth sex trafficking victims cannot legally consent to participating in commercial sex because power dynamics at play are recognized (even if the youth is old enough to consent to non-commercial sex). However, youth engaged in other criminalized economies, such as the drug trades, are seen as consenting to participate because of racist assumptions about who is a "child sex trafficking victim" and who is a "gang member" or "drug dealer."

For youth who have been or are involved in foster care and juvenile justice, these assumptions overlook the lack of options for these youth and contribute to further stereotypes. These stereotypes are frequently loaded with racism, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and Latine children, and contribute to reduced identification and support for youth being trafficked in all labor sectors. For example, some law enforcement jurisdictions' "first responder protocols" may only include partnerships with commercial sexual exploitation of children organizations that are not equipped to serve other minor trafficking survivors.

One other challenge with the current definition is that it covers a broad variety of experiences. Under the current definition, trafficking victimization may include experiences as diverse as a baby or small child exploited commercially for sex or child sexual abuse materials (CSAM/CSEM), a 12-year-old groomed and exploited for commercial sex by an older "romantic partner" or parental figure, or a 17-year-old homeless youth trading sex or engaging in other forms of criminalized behavior to support their independence from an abusive or transphobic family until they are old enough to apply for their own apartment. Often, there may be an overlap with minors being exploited in several of these ways, and engagement with systems as a minor **often leads to exploitation**. While all of these are situations no child should find themselves in, they each point towards different root causes, and would benefit from different policy and service recommendations.

Additionally, not all minors who have experienced trafficking in commercial sex define their experiences the same. Survivors who

experienced familial trafficking as youth may feel left out of trafficking framings that focus on grooming and explicit coercion. People who experienced trafficking during their early childhood may feel unrepresented in framings that focus on "youth who trade sex."

While there is *always* a harmful power dynamic behind an adult paying to have sexual access to a minor, there is not always a uniform experience of older youth who have traded sex. These youth may be grateful for acknowledgement of support in exiting their exploitation. They might also feel invalidated by framings that emphasize *only* their victimhood without acknowledging their resilience, resourcefulness, or reasons they were trying to take care of themselves in the first place. Research has shown that youth who experienced sexual exploitation may define themselves as "strong survivors of terrible circumstances and reject the 'victim' label."[33] This points to how one-size-fits-all anti-trafficking messaging that frames all youth commercial sex as if it is the same can undermine older youths' resilience and autonomy and lead to harmful impacts.[34] Rescue efforts hyper-focused on saving often do not adequately address the underlying structural and community conditions that led to youth involvement in the sex trades in the first place. These conditions may include abuse and exploitation in foster care, unstable housing, economic insecurity, abusive family members or dating partners, or prior sexual abuse. Furthermore, efforts focused on a one-size-fits-all model of rescue may diminish the complex and diverse experiences of young people in commercial sex, and is not a substitute preventing the exploitation of minors.

According to a study conducted in six geographically dispersed U.S. cities with youth in the sex trades:

- **15% of youth were forced, coerced, or exploited by a third party, who were often people in their community or networks;**
- **About 19% relied on a supportive, "mutually beneficial" market facilitator.[35]**

Safe Harbor laws exist in many states and are intended to protect youth from criminal charges related to prostitution. They vary in implementation and effectiveness. These laws have gained national momentum as a strategy to address the sexual exploitation of youth. In theory, Safe Harbor laws decriminalize youth in the sex trades who are younger than 18, often with the limitations described earlier in this resource. However, even in states where these laws exist, young people are still sometimes arrested for prostitution or charged with associated crimes, such as possession of controlled substances, where their substance use may be voluntary or possibly a coercion tactic used by third-party exploiters.[36]

While some states offer resources to young people instead of arresting them, other states require participation in supportive "diversion" services for being "at-risk" of trafficking or identified by law enforcement as trafficking victims.[37] Mandated services are often not equipped to support young people and may expose them to further system entanglement, causing additional harm. Further, youth need specialized services that do not carry stigma and shame.

Funneling youth into mandatory services results in net-widening which increases systems involvement for youth who might otherwise have had their charges dismissed or avoided ongoing contact with courts, probation, child welfare, and associated surveillance.[38] Increased contact with the juvenile legal system is associated with recidivism and negative health and economic outcomes. Although these mandates intend to provide supportive services, the impact is increasing the number of youth with systems involvement.[39] These laws are also limiting in that the day a young person turns 18 they are no longer protected, even if their material circumstances have not changed. Lastly, they do not offer protection from other, more common, ways that youth are criminalized for survival activities. This often impacts their ability to access housing and work, and puts them at increased risk of being trafficked or otherwise exploited further once they enter adulthood, when they will have even less legal and social protections.

By contrast, a public health approach encourages sustainable solutions that grow with the young person. Studies have found that although youth increase their agency in the sex trades over time most youth report a desire to exit the sex trades one day. This might lead to the assumption that youth would welcome rescue. However, one study found that youth are unlikely to seek anti-trafficking services because, "[f]rom their perspectives, the anti- trafficking discourses and practices that they would encounter in these organizations threaten to criminalize their adult support networks, imprison friends and loved ones, prevent them from earning a living, and return them to the dependencies of their youth."[40] Street outreach workers who talked to sexually exploited youth about their most prevalent needs found the most prominent requests to be: "support and crisis intervention, safety planning, educational support, mental health services, employment services, sexual health services, and housing."[41] Notably, criminal legal interventions were not mentioned as survivors often experience them as unhelpful at best and harmful and even traumatic at worst.

Finally, a high proportion of youth in the sex trades have experienced family abuse or rejection due to LGBTQ+ stigma.[42] Confronting and uprooting homophobia and transphobia are essential parts of exploitation prevention, as these oppressive systems (such as racism and misogyny) contribute directly and indirectly to harm. The human

trafficking field's significant investment in faith-based initiatives and framings, which may not have LGBTQ+ affirming services, may mean lack of appropriate options for LGBTQ+ youth. Even worse, efforts to prevent a young person from expressing their gender identity or orientation are common experiences for LGBTQ+ youth, and may be incorporated into anti-trafficking programs. These approaches, sometimes called "conversion therapy" or "cognitive behavioral therapy for gender dysphoria", increase youth vulnerability to trafficking.[43] For solutions see the "Opportunities: Family and Youth Justice" Section.

Learn more:

[Child trafficking and exploitation: Historical roots, preventive policies, and the Pediatrician's role](#)

[Youth in the Sex Trades, Make The Switch](#)

[A Public Health Approach to Global Child Sex Trafficking](#)

[A Traumagenic Social Ecological Framework for Understanding and Intervening with Sex Trafficked Children and Youth](#)

Drivers and Opportunities Across the Social-Ecological Model

As we consider causes of and solutions to address human trafficking, we can think in terms of drivers that cause or perpetuate human trafficking or impede adequate solutions, and opportunities to prevent trafficking through targeted action and systemic change. The following drivers of and public health opportunities to end these intersecting forms of violence and exploitation are not exhaustive. Many of the drivers and opportunities are mirrored across the different levels of the [social-ecological model](#). For example, economic justice at the community and interpersonal level as well as well as an institutional and societal level.

As with all violence prevention and public health work, it is essential that those closest to the problem are meaningfully involved in or leading program development, policy advocacy, and evaluation. We subscribe to the disability justice concept of "Nothing About Us Without Us." In exploring and experimenting with public health opportunities outlined in this section, practitioners, with and without lived experience, should ensure that people in the sex trades and survivors of human trafficking are at the decision-making table and that work is done in collaboration and reciprocal partnership.

Societal and Structural

Drivers of Human Trafficking	Public Health Opportunities
The "American Dream" and current model of capitalism	Economic justice
Structural oppression	Disability, race, gender, and land justice
Culture of criminalization and punishment	Decriminalization of survival strategies

Community and Institutional

Drivers of Human Trafficking	Public Health Opportunities
Poverty wages and housing insecurity	Living wages and housing justice
Funding + programmatic restrictions in non-profits	Transformative organizations
Child welfare, foster care, and juvenile legal involvement	Family and youth justice

Interpersonal and Individual

Drivers of Human Trafficking	Public Health Opportunities
Isolation and harmful relationship dynamics	Connection and care

Societal and Structural

Driver: The "American Dream" and current model of capitalism

Capitalism is dependent on exploited labor because the profits generated by workers always exceed their wages or other compensation. The "American Dream" tells workers that all they have to do is work hard enough and they will be successful and valuable as a human being. This societal norm invites people and businesses to exploit others in order to achieve individual interests, and often leads to shame or stigma directed at people in poverty. It also inherently degrades people with disabilities or chronic illness who may be treated as if they have less value, especially if they are unable to perform labor or produce in the same way.

Under capitalism, workers are obligated to find individual solutions to structural problems– such as poverty, housing crises, and lack of a social safety net. Poverty wages create situations where people opt into forms of labor or employment they would not choose otherwise in order to make enough money to provide for themselves and their families. Like with our earlier example of wage theft, many of the solutions we currently have in place rely on worker knowledge of labor law and how to access recourse. This leaves workers in the position of consistently defending themselves against well-funded employers who benefit financially from employee ignorance of labor law.

Human trafficking can be considered an extension of unregulated capitalism. Particularly in underground or undervalued economies, the most vulnerable populations are targeted by traffickers because they have the least amount of institutional power and protection under the law. Regardless of industry, most people are forced to work in order to meet basic needs. The same conditions that make people vulnerable to trafficking also drive people to traffic others as a strategy for escaping poverty, building wealth, or being valuable under capitalism. Globally, we see the impact of capitalism on exploitation: while poverty creates vulnerability to trafficking, the International Labor Organization reports that over half of all forced labor happens in wealthy countries.[44]

Learn More:

[The Nexus between Capitalism and Human Trafficking](#)

[Are you better or worse off? Understanding exploitation through comparison](#)

Societal and Structural

> "Too many campaigns feed into the formula that trafficking is an exceptional problem requiring exceptional remedies, rather than the result of systemic oppression requiring systemic solutions for all workers."
> – Sameera Hafiz, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Opportunity: Economic justice

Advocate for living wages, worker rights, and pro-labor policies that mitigate the impacts of capitalism and shift economic conditions from an individualist "free for all" to collective responsibility for the health and well-being of everyone. Support worker organizing for safety in all forms of labor (including sexual). There is often a difference between the needs of industry executives and shareholders and workers. For example, you can support grassroots organizing for the safety and rights of individuals working in pharmaceutical plants without supporting many of the capitalist norms of the global pharmaceutical industry. You can support grassroots organizing for the safety and rights of farmworkers without supporting the ways in which large agricultural companies are driving small family farms out of business. And similarly, you can support grassroots organizing for the safety and rights of people in the sex trades without supporting unethical practices among online platforms or places of sex work.

Addressing employment discrimination for trans people, disabled people, and other marginalized peoples is human trafficking prevention. When people cannot find safe, non-discriminatory employment, they are more vulnerable to trafficking. When people lose their employment, they are at increased risk for homelessness, violence, illness, and taking on debt from unethical lenders (including traffickers). When people experience homelessness, violence, illness, or massive debt, they are at increased risk of trafficking. Safe employment, labor rights, living wages, and non-discriminatory practices underpin so many other vulnerabilities to trafficking. They may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of "trafficking prevention," but they are essential to a public health approach to preventing exploitation and violence.

Societal and Structural

Advocate against legislation that drives the sex trades and other street economies further underground and always involve a diversity of perspectives from people working in the sex trades to center their voices and needs before making policy decisions that directly impact them. For example, SESTA/FOSTA has had a profoundly negative impact on the safety and economic stability of people engaged in the sex trades both willingly and by force. Another example is current campaigns against financial processing for legal adult services. These policies increase economic vulnerability to exploitation and also impact trafficking survivors who might be using online work as a means toward independence to avoid returning to their traffickers, which is far more common than many people realize. Banking discrimination against online sex workers may also drive them into more precarious forms of sex work, such as full service street based sex work. Thus far, survivors who have spoken out against banking discrimination have largely been ignored by banking companies.

In Practice:

[The Forced Labour Convention Protocol](#)

[New Jersey Domestic Worker Bill of Rights](#)

[Impact of the Child Tax Credit on Immigrant and Migrant Survivors](#)

[Supplemental Security Income Restoration Act of 2021](#)

Learn More:

[Labour rights: The means to tackle human trafficking](#)

[Sex Work is a Disability Issue. So Why Doesn't the Disability Community Recognize That](#)

[Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women](#)

Societal and Structural

Driver: Structural Oppression

Imagine that someone built a community center, and was adamant that they did not want people with limited mobility to be able to learn, work, or shop there. They made the front steps high and ensured there was not room to build a ramp. They refused to install an elevator but kept all of their community's best foods, luxuries, safety protections, and even necessities on the higher floors, to ensure that nobody who didn't meet their criteria could get to them. "Survival of the fittest," they said, pretending to themselves and each other that their exclusionary actions weren't about hatred but were instead about a greater good.

Imagine that after a period of time, a new owner bought the community center. This new owner is kind and nonjudgmental, and definitely wants all people, including those with limited mobility, to have access to necessities and safety. As long as this center remains inaccessible, though, the building will continue to perpetuate oppression and disparities. The oppression is about the structure, not about whether or not any one person operating the structure now is themselves ableist, racist, misogynistic, or exclusionary. In this example, the oppression is built into the building itself.

The scenario described above is a demonstration of a kind of oppression called ableism, and illustrates the ways ableism is *structural*. What we mean by structural is that the systems and structures themselves privilege some people and disadvantage others, whether or not the individuals who are part of those structures would ever want to treat people unequally. Ableism is a driver of human trafficking. Stigma, isolation, and workplace or education inequity place disabled individuals at higher risk for human trafficking, and power dynamics leave them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by caregivers.[45] Survivors may develop disabilities or chronic illness as a result of their trafficking experiences. Services for disabled survivors, including shelter, may be inaccessible due to issues such as poor needs assessment, lack of accessible accommodations, lack of options for specific dietary needs, challenges with medication availability and storage, inaccessible telephone and communication equipment, or marginalization or discrimination from other clients.[46]

Societal and Structural

Survivors with certain mental health diagnoses may be refused admission on the grounds that the shelter "cannot manage their disability," despite the mental health impacts of human trafficking.[47] Beyond physical space limitations, the way our societal workplace expectations are set up fostter economic instability. Many people with disabilities are unable to work full-time or require flexible work hours, yet are expected to follow normalized workplace "routines" that place unequal burden on them. Financial disability benefits do not provide sufficient support and current policies present barriers to increasing economic security over time, increasing vulnerability to exploitation.[48] It also makes it challenging for survivors to regain economic stability, social connection, and wellbeing after trafficking.

More broadly, "structural oppression" is not just physical buildings, but many systems and practices present in both our culture and government. These systems have created and continue to create unnecessary barriers to some people's wellness, safety, and security. Structural oppression is one of the most significant drivers of human trafficking because it encompasses so many forms of oppression, thus this section is longer and more detailed than other drivers. **Ableism** is one form of structural oppression. Three other examples of structural oppression that perpetuate the conditions for trafficking include racism, colonialism, and misogyny.

Racism	Colonialism	Misogny
Racism is the practice of discriminating against people on the basis of their race or ethnic background. It can be personal (a person behaving in racist ways) or structural (a system that is inherently or historically biased or exclusionary).	Colonialism is "domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation [in order to extend and maintain] a nation's political and economic control over another people or area."[49] It relies on "the subjugation of one people to another," which means forcing one group of people to submit to the control of another group of people.[50]	Misogyny is discrimination against women that is rooted in a belief of male superiority and entitlement. It can be personal (such as a personal bias against women or qualities perceived as "feminine"), cultural (such as assumptions about how a woman should behave), or structural (such as policies that exclude women from full access to economic security, work, or services).

Societal and Structural

Because people and communities have different identities and experiences, different forms of oppression intertwine in ways that amplify their consequences. For example, an African American woman in the United States cannot neatly categorize which of her experiences are based on race and which are based on gender. This is because the kinds of gender discrimination she experiences might be different from those experienced by a white woman or a Latina. For this reason, we do not address each of these forms of oppression separately.

While Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, colonized or subjugated populations, and women and gender-nonconforming people do experience increased rates of violence, this violence is due to cultural, systemic, and structural norms, policies, and practices. Women are not inherently more vulnerable to violence; rigid gender norms and cultural practices make them more vulnerable. Additionally, racism, colonialism, misogyny, ableism, classism, antisemitism, and other common forms of oppression often create harmful impacts even for those who are not in the targeted group. By focusing on the systems, structures, and cultural forms of oppression, we can reduce harm to all people.

Throughout the history of the United States, practices such as redlining, increasing criminalization, Black codes and Jim Crow laws, residential schools, and the theft of Indigenous lands have excluded Black, Indigenous, and other people of color from safety, wealth, opportunity, and cultural recognition. **Historical and generational economic exclusion of Black, Indigenous, and people of color has cemented a racial wealth gap.** This gap is further compounded by discrimination based on gender and ability. Historical and continuing practices such as racist employment, education, and housing discrimination on a structural level make it more difficult for people of color to have the same opportunities as white people. All of these practices have an especially painful heritage, as the modern concept of race was originally created to justify and perpetuate them.

Societal and Structural

One of the underlying beliefs of colonialism is that people only deserve sovereignty to the extent that their ways of life, cultural norms, and ethical choices look like or serve people in power. In non-Western cultures, people's relationships to their bodies, to land or material things ("property"), or to women, children, elders, and gender-expansive community members often look different. Under colonialism, non-Western people, places, things, and relationships have been coercively and fraudulently assimilated through systems that claim to "help."

Objectification

Colonial violence leads to objectification – when a person or community does not fit imposed norms and is viewed by the dominant culture as less-human, aberrant, or less deserving of compassion and safety. One form of objectification is the fetishization and exoticization of Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latina women. This is reinforced by the media, which then reinforces colonialist and imperialist stereotypes that reduce "foreign" women to sex objects. This form of racism is compounded by policing of the "illicit massage industry."[51] Counter to recommended approaches for building safety for migrant workers, policing of massage services are "inextricably linked to the misplaced advocacy of the anti-trafficking movement, which often claims it is saving Asian massage workers, when it is, in actuality, subjecting them to varied forms of state and stated-sanctioned-if-privatized violence."[52]

Another form of objectification, adultification, is when Black, Indigenous, and children of color are treated as if they are "more mature" than they are.[53] This leads to them being blamed or doubted when they are sexually abused or exploited. It also leads to harsher punishments in schools for normal adolescent behavior and harsher punishment in the criminal legal system for survival or self-defense. These disparities lead to higher rates of both trafficking and criminalization for Black girls, which cannot be resolved without addressing root causes.[54] Public bias perceptions also stereotype who is a *trafficker* as well, based on racism and stranger danger panic, when in reality many trafficking survivors know the person(s) exploiting them. The racist framing of who is a trafficker results from a combination of public ignorance and deliberate, biased propaganda.[55]

Societal and Structural

While gender non-conforming youth of color do not experience adultification in the same way as girls of color, they are often sexualized early and told that their orientation or gender expression are deviant. In fact, **gender non conforming youth are twice as likely to be targeted and experience child sexual abuse.**[56] When safe, gender-affirming medical and community care is not available to transgender young people, trans and gender non-conforming youth may end up entering criminalized labor markets (including trading sex) in order to afford and access care.[57] Legislative and cultural discrimination against transgender individuals is correlated with increased rates of homelessness, joblessness, poverty, and police violence, all of which increase risk of trafficking.[58]

Trafficking survivors are broadly thought of as being cisgender women and girls who have experienced trafficking in the sex trades. Findings suggest that transgender youth are overrepresented in the sex trades, and are more likely to be criminalized for it.[59] Still, there is little research on transgender people's experiences of the sex trades or on the relevance of contemporary framings of "trafficking" for this community.[60] The available research does show that cisgender men and transgender people are rarely considered victims by law enforcement and anti-trafficking organizations, resulting in fewer relevant resources for these survivors.

Colonial "helping" in action

Residential schools in both the US and Canada operated under the motto "Kill the Indian; Save the Child," where Indigenous children were stolen from their families and homelands and taken to a boarding school where they were forced to abandon their cultures, beaten, starved, poisoned, sexually abused.[61,62] They were violently punished for speaking their native languages andd had their hair cut off and chemicals poured on their scalps. Thousands of children died and in many cases were killed in these "schools", and their bodies are still being found and rematriated.[63,64] When children today are taught about the horrors of residential schools - if they learn about them at all- it is often through a colonial lens that acts as if the schools were well-intentioned but failed in practice.[65] This is an example of ongoing colonial violence and erasure, and of how white supremacist projects under the guise of "help" devastate families, fracture communities, and generate widespread trauma.

Societal and Structural

The continued emphasis on trafficking in the sex trades obscures the ways structural oppression drives trafficking in other forms of labor. Forced commercial sex has been framed as the "most brutal" form of slavery, which denies the lived experiences of survivors who experience sexual violence as part of labor exploitation, or who experience labor violations or sexual violence as part of their consensual and/or legal sex work.

Objectification normalizes exploitation

Cultural objectification and adultification of Black and Indigenous girls, girls of color, and gender non-conforming youth normalizes their exploitation. Sexual and labor exploitation are tools of colonization that have been used strategically throughout history to subjugate. From the systematic assault of enslaved African-Americans, Native American and First Nations genocide and residential schools, and Asian internment camps and "comfort women" for U.S. soldiers in World War II– racism and colonialism has been used as a tool for state-sanctioned U.S. violence. This legacy continues on today, as evidences by of the horrifying rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people.[66,67] This racialized violence has been gendered as well, with Black, Indigenous, and other women and girls of color disproportionately impacted by not just trafficking in commercial sex but domestic servitude.[68] Despite this history, the dominant anti-trafficking focus has portrayed cisgender white girls and women as the primary targets of trafficking. The "white slave panic" **narrative leverages racist and anti-immigrant fears to promote legislation and interventions that largely ignore Black survivors, target sex workers, and promote anti-immigrant policies.**

"How, then, might we better understand the social problems of human trafficking at the various intersections of racial, colonial, and heteropatriarchal violence? And how do we understand the processes by which this violence takes place?"[69]– Robert Nonomura, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University

Societal and Structural

Objectification and exploitation are part of structural oppression

The most common vulnerabilities for trafficking in all forms of labor in the U.S. include recent migration, unstable housing, and substance use concerns.[70] For trafficking in forms of labor other than commercial sex, these also included economic hardship and having a criminal record. Women comprise nearly half of the world's 272 million migrants and 74% of the world's migrant domestic workers.[71] These migrant women experience devastating rates of sexual violence alongside their other forms of exploitation.[72] Women often experience homelessness or housing instability as a result of domestic or sexual violence by partners or landlords, and homeless women are significantly more likely to have experienced domestic and sexual violence in their lifetimes.[73]

Globally, a higher percentage of those in all forms of forced labor are men than women, although women are more likely to be represented in forced commercial sex.[74] Across the U.S. ther eis a lack of awareness, support, and services for male survivors, even though the same patriarchal norms that lead to sexualized violence against women also harm men. Conceptualizing this as "patriarchal violence" acknowledges the ways gendered violence is not a men vs. women issue but, rather a patriarchy vs. agency issue.[75]

Learn More:

[Perfect Victims and Real Survivors: The Iconic Victim in Domestic Human Trafficking Law](#)

[Transgender People and Human Trafficking](#)

['What's in a Name?': Mislabelling, misidentification, and the US government's failure to protect human trafficking survivors in the Central American refugee crisis](#)

[The Lasting Legacy of Exclusion: How the Law that Brought Us TANF Excluded Immigrant Families and Institutionalized Racism in Our Social Support System](#)

[On Intersectionality](#)

[Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics](#)

Societal and Structural

Opportunity: Disability, race, gender, and land justice

Let's return to the example of the inaccessible community center. If the building is not accessible, no amount of anti-oppression belief on the part of the new director will change the structure of the building. Hanging a sign that says "all are welcome here" on the front door and attempts to treat every community member equally will not make the center accessible. If the new director is genuinely committed to making the community center accessible, they will need to knock out a few walls, widen some doorways, make space for an elevator, and begin developing plans for a new center that will be built using the principles of universal design, even as they keep trying to make the existing center as accessible as possible.

Addressing ableism in a building requires significant restructuring and (ideally) the development of new buildings that are intentionally designed to be accessible and inclusive. Similarly, **addressing all forms of structural oppression to achieve** health equity **requires envisioning new systems and structures rather than simply trying to get more people access to historically oppressive systems.**

Because oppression creates different circumstances for different people, health equity is inseparable from racial and gender justice. Effective prevention for human trafficking will **advocate for public health from a root cause approach**. This approach sees beyond the individual and addresses the systemic factors that make marginalized populations more susceptible to exploitation and impact their ability to thrive. Learn more about health equity, and **partner with local organizations on their health equity initiatives.**

The glorification of independence and overwork get in the way of healthy interdependence that creates accessible communities and workplaces for people with disabilities. **Learn more about the disability justice framework**, and incorporate universal design into your policies and programming.

> "The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone justly according to their circumstances." - Paula Dresser, Race Matters Institute

Societal and Structural

Lack of access to generational wealth reduces people's access to safety and self-determination. **Advocate for reparations** via direct cash payments to Black, Indigenous, and people of color for the generational harm historical racism, exploitation, and colonization.

[Normalized violence against undocumented refugees, asylum-seekers](#), and immigrants are often part of the coercion involved in human trafficking. **Support comprehensive immigration reform** and completely separate victim support resources from law and immigration enforcement systems; for example, program funding that requires cooperation with law enforcement and hotlines that partner with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The right to bodily autonomy is fundamental to any violence prevention framework, especially given the history of [forced sterilization and eugenics](#) in the United States–and thus [reproductive justice](#) is [survivor justice](#). **Promote an expansive definition of reproductive justice** that ensures comprehensive paid family leave, universal childcare, and access to all family planning options including abortion.

In Practice:

[Survivors' Agenda](#)

[Ending the War on Black Trans People](#)

[10 Strategies for Creating Inclusive Healthcare Environments for LGBTQIA+ People](#)

[Black Reproductive Justice Policy Agenda](#)

[Racism as a Root Cause Approach](#)

Resist Colonialism:

[The Sogorea Te Land Trust](#) and [Honor Native Land Tax](#)

[Stop ICE Transfers: Promoting Health, Unifying Families, Healing Communities](#)

Learn More:

[Building Bridges: The Strategic Imperative for Advancing Health Equity and Racial Justice](#)

[Skin, Tooth, and Bone: A Disability Justice Primer](#)

Societal and Structural

Driver: Culture of criminalization and punishment

The criminal legal system often creates instability for communities and families through police violence, surveillance, incarceration, and criminalization. For trafficking in the sex trades, these responses often focus on "rescuing victims." For trafficking in other criminalized forms of labor, this often leads to perpetuation of victim-blaming and racist views about those engaged in street economies. For trafficking that involves migrants, this often puts survivors and their families at increased risk of deportation and harm. In all these cases, an emphasis on criminalization often overshadows the need to address material conditions (such as poverty or lack of access to safe migration) that lead to labor exploitation and intersecting forms of violence.

Criminal prosecution is overemphasized as a solution. Access to services, protection, and resources is often used as a way to require cooperation with law enforcement, which replicates exploitative patterns of coercive control. Many state criminal laws do not make exceptions for or allow immunity from prosecution for crimes associated with trafficking victimization. In those that do, there are often limits (age, type of trafficking, number of offenses) that do not account for a variety of experiences of victimization.

Criminalized and incarcerated survivors and sex workers are often subject to legal abuses and further exploitation such as strip searches, violence, and verbal abuse. They lose bodily autonomy, having to ask permission for even the most basic needs, again replicating patterns of abuse and control used by traffickers. This trauma is amplified in states that allow for forced and exploited labor in prisons, in which survivors of trafficking are enslaved by the state.

Trafficking survivors are often charged with crimes they were forced to commit – known as "forced criminality" – with no relief. Specifically, survivors who are coerced or forced by their traffickers to engage in recruitment, transportation, or control of other victims are often seen only as perpetrators without regard for how their victimization impacts their actions. This victim-criminal duality also is leveraged against trafficking survivors whose acts of self defense, escape, or protection are criminalized.

Societal and Structural

Similarly, lawful immigration status is only offered (and never guaranteed) to survivors who agree to cooperate with law enforcement. For protection, law enforcement must view the survivor as deserving of a "victim" status.[76] Criminalization of trafficking victims does not consider whether victims will be in a position to reveal details about traffickers and their operations. Instead, criminalization often assigns victim or criminal status to survivors of trafficking based primarily on their utility to the criminal legal system. For migrant survivors who are willing to cooperate, there is a 5-10 year wait for U-visa approval that is growing rapidly.[77] The 2022 U.S. State Department Trafficking in Persons Report indicates a decrease of T-visa approvals from 2020-2021, and a backlog of 2,299 T-visa applications pending as of the date of publication. Further, denials (which result in deportation) are frequently related to a previous criminal history, which often impacts survivors of trafficking in the sex trades and other criminalized economies.

Predominant policymaking supposes that harsher laws and penalties will deter traffickers by assuming that the primary issues are criminal activity and criminal enterprises, rather than structural discrimination and oppression.[78] Because trafficking is more common among stigmatized or precarious work, and because the sex trades are often informal and criminalized, there is little accountability for exploitative or unsafe labor practices. The most marginalized populations (Black, Indigenous, women and gender-nonconforming individuals, LGBTQ+, disabled, poor, housing-insecure folks) are targeted because they have the least amount of social support or institutional power and protection under the law.[79]

Societal and Structural

In the sex trades specifically, **a solution often offered, partial criminalization (also known as "End Demand," "Nordic Model," or "Equality Model") suggests that criminalizing sex buyers while treating people selling sex as victims will reduce the demand for commercial sex.** This model has gained global popularity as a strategy to stop trafficking despite the lack of evidence supporting it.[80] This model conflates trafficking with sex work and removes the autonomy of people in the sex trades, and is known to replicate the harms of full criminalization.[81] Under partial criminalization, it is technically not a crime to be a sex worker, but many other aspects of the person's existence are impacted due to continued high contact with law enforcement who are ostensibly enforcing sex buying, but leads to abuse or arrest for other crimes such as drug use, immigration status, previous criminal activity, etc.

Partial criminalization impacts individuals' relationships, child custody, economic security, vulnerability to sexual violence and other forms of abuse, and many of the harm reduction strategies that individuals in the sex trades use to keep themselves safe. [82] For example, those who live with or help someone in the sex trades, are roommates with, or offer a ride to can be charged with brothel-keeping, pimping, or other related charges. **Partial criminalization perpetuates rather than reduces violence, furthers the risk of exploitation, and fails to address the root causes of exploitation and violence.** Sex workers in areas that have adopted this model report increased vulnerability to violence from clients, continued harassment and/or sexual abuse by law enforcement, and pathologizing narratives about their pre-determined victimhood.[83]

Learn More:

[“We Have the Right Not to Be ‘Rescued’…”: When Anti-Trafficking Programmes Undermine the Health and Well-Being of Sex Workers](#)

[Accountability and the Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking](#)

[Cops Don’t Stop Violence](#)

[The Impact of ‘End Demand’ Legislation on Women Sex Workers](#)

[Attacking Demand, Escalating Violence: The Impact of Twenty Years of End Demand Legislation on People Who Trade Sex](#)

Societal and Structural

Opportunity: Decriminalization of survival

Reduce peoples' contact with the criminal legal system by advocating for ending the criminalization of sex work, drug use, immigration, "truancy", "vagrancy," houslessness, and other survival activities. Ending criminalization of survival activities and consensual sexual behavior between adults does not mean decrminalizing human trafficking or remove penalties for engaging a minor in commercial sex or an adult through force, fraud, or coercion.

Advocate for policies that remove stipulations requiring victims to cooperate with law enforcement in exchange for services and documentation to stay in the U.S., such as victim's compensation and U-Visas/T-Visas. Be wary of well-intentioned criminal justice reforms, such as trafficking victim diversion courts, that result in 'net widening', instead of simply ending prosecution. As previously discussed, diversion courts often do not meet the needs of the individuals coerced into programs and can create new problems.

Develop options for safety, justice, and healing that are separate from the criminal legal system. While some survivors might choose to engage with law enforcement or legal cases against their traffickers, many will not. Transformative models for healing, justice, and accountability ensure we are meeting survivors' needs, regardless of whether or not they are participating in the criminal legal system. Abolitionist communities have been developing interventions and responses for in-community violence and healing-centered prevention strategies that do not rely on policing and punishment. No one model is perfect or 100% effective at preventing or addressing violence, especially the criminal legal system. Survivors should not have to choose between criminal legal system involvement and nothing; they deserve meaningful options for safety, healing, and accountability.

Advocate for the release of incarcerated survivors and people criminalized for sex work, and support vacatur laws that allow survivors to expunge or seal their criminal convictions related to their victimization. As of 2017, there were 36 states with vacatur laws. State Report Cards: Grading Criminal Record Relief Laws for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Societal and Structural

Reform sex offender registries: View of Surveillance and Entanglement: How mandatory sex offender registration impacts criminalized survivors of human trafficking

Learn More:

TOWARDS ABOLITION: A Learning And Action Guide for Public Health

Is Sex Work Decriminalization the Answer? What the Research Tells Us

Interrupting Criminalization

TransformHarm.Org: A Resource Hub for Ending Violence

In Practice:

Supporting Sex Workers & Survivors: Lessons for Defense Campaigns

Survivor Reentry Project

One Million Experiments: Ideas about what keeps us safe

Creative Interventions Toolkit

Fumbling Towards Repair

"Regardless of someone's lived experience, there's just the reality for many of us of internalized shame and stigma around sex trade involvement and I have grave concerns about what it means if someone is carrying that [internalized shame about sex trading] and they show up to an organization where that is further messaged. That results in real harm, the soul level harm that comes with judgments and being in spaces where those conversations are happening." – NSN Survivor Interview

Community and Institutional

Driver: Poverty wages and housing insecurity

The U.S. government has not raised the federal minimum wage to match the value of workers' labor since the 1970s. If wages matched the rate of inflation, the current federal minimum wage would be about $24 an hour, versus the current $7.25 an hour.[84] Economic systems encourage business to pay as little as possible for labor, supplies, and overhead while striving for increases in profits. Thus, employers and businesses are legally incentivized to exploit their workers by not paying a living wage, and the burden to provide benefits to underpaid employees is then shifted to government benefits systems. Because these systems are often politicized in ways that disregard their potential for preventing exploitation and other poor health outcomes, processes to access and keep benefits can be burdensome and restrictions can create barriers to safety. The socially acceptable practice of maximizing business profit while decreasing worker pay relative to the value of their labor mirrors other forms of labor exploitation. While human trafficking is often painted as a division between free and forced labor, the reality is that exploitation exists among a continuum, much of which is legal and normalized.[85] The values statement of the National Survivor Network (NSN) states that "human trafficking is horrific, and is an extension of rather than an exception to the range of exploitation inherent in capitalist systems of labor. Normalization of exploitative labor practices increases vulnerability to trafficking."

When workers do not make a living wage, their ability to care for themselves and their families is compromised. Food insecurity, transportation expenses, childcare, medical expenses (particularly in states that have not expanded Medicaid coverage), and housing become vulnerabilities that increase someone's risk of exploitation. Gentrification, housing discrimination (both legal and illegal), lack of tenant rights, lack of affordable healthcare and childcare, and rising costs of basic expenses place working-class people at risk of housing instability and homelessness.

Community and Institutional

Specific to the sex trades, fines associated with prostitution and solicitation charges keep individuals in poverty and further distance them from the stability needed to leave the sex trades.[86] **Criminal charges prevent both sex workers and trafficking survivors (and many individuals have been both at different times) from attaining housing and other employment opportunities.** Societal stigma around pornography, forced pornography, or nonconsensual dissemination of sexually explicit materials (sometimes referred to as "revenge porn") makes it hard to find other work. These collateral consequences of punishing people for being poor, being in the sex trades, or even being victims of sexual crimes increase their vulnerability to trafficking by removing their pathways to leave.

Learn More:

Are you better or worse off? Understanding exploitation through comparison

The Wages of Human Trafficking

Housing Discrimination and Sex Work

The Perfect Storm: How supervisors get away with sexually harassing workers who work alone at night

Is Fruitvale gentrifying? Did it prevent displacement?

"Conditions of low-wage work—including unenforced or underenforced employment law—not only enable human trafficking, but continue to exploit those who survive their trafficking only to enter what can be an equally exploitative low-wage labor market." - Rana M. Jaleel

Community and Institutional

Opportunity: Living wages and housing justice

Support policies to increase [local and federal minimum wages](#) to move closer to a living wage and advocate within your own organization to voluntarily offer a living wage to all employees. Organizational leaders can educate funders and stakeholders about the importance of [nonprofit wage equity](#)and paying nonprofit worker salaries comparable to wages in related fields. Hire an equity firm to conduct an analysis of your organization and make [pay equity](#) and salary transparency a part organization policy. Some may view caring for your organization or its employees in this way as taking away from programmatic trafficking efforts. **However, many nonprofit employees experience housing, food, economic insecurity, or other forms violence and vulnerability during employment.** FreeFrom's [Prioritizing Financial Security in the Movement to End IPV](#) report found that many nonprofit employees in the anti-violence movement struggle to make ends meet, and that some are experiencing intimate violence in their personal lives, creating financially insecurity. It is disingenuous for nonprofits to advocate for broad policies that they are not committed to implementing in their own practice.

Advocate for low barrier, [universal basic income programs](#) **in your community.**[87] Establish cross-sector partnerships designed to meet the needs of people in poverty more broadly and without required involvement from law enforcement.[88]

Learn about and educate your community about the need for [low barrier housing options](#) and inclusive, non-intrusive screening methods for immediate housing needs. Similarly to living wages, anti-trafficking nonprofits providing housing support and emergency or transitional shelter can evaluate their own protocols to ensure low barriers for their programs. By modeling our ideals, we change our communities' norms.

Promote access to high-quality low-cost and free education across all levels and trades to create economic pathways to financial and housing stability. This also reduces the likelihood that tuition and fees can be formal or informal leverage in the coercion of survivors. Again, nonprofits can model these ideals by providing generous professional development and advancement opportunities to their employees.

Community and Institutional

Advocate for economically accessible childcare and universal healthcare. In addition to reducing barriers to economic stability, these also reduce the likelihood of exploitative labor practices (up to and including trafficking) in these sectors. Nonprofits can evaluate the employee benefits packages to ensure that wellness is prioritized for staff, some of whom may be survivors or have identities or experiences that increase statistical risk of exploitation.

Care for your community. Like the other drivers of trafficking, advocating to end housing insecurity, homelessness, low wages, and poverty may feel overwhelming. Remember that small steps to support your community can help prevent exploitation. Advocate for policy and social change while taking small, tangible steps to show solidarity and support for people in your community. In addition to organizations engaging in policy advocacy, you can shape community policy through education and getting involved. Learn more about mutual aid, food justice, and land justice movements and join efforts in your community to ensure affordable housing, stop displacement, and prevent homelessness.

In Practice:

The Rights-Based Approach in Housing for Survivors of Human Trafficking

Disrupting Displacement Financing in Oakland and Beyond

California Approves First State-Guaranteed Income For Foster Youth

Form a Tenants' Union!

Steps To Expand the Supply of Affordable Housing for Low-Wage Workers

Black Homeownership Initiative: Building Black Wealth

Learn More:

Housing Justice National Platform

Housing First: Improving Access to Housing for Youth Survivors

Civil litigation on behalf of trafficking survivors: a new approach to accountability?

Community and Institutional

Driver: Funding + Programmatic Restrictions in Non-Profits

Social service non-profits are often structurally incentivized to ensure their own existence rather than address root causes of labor exploitation or sexual violence. Some people refer to this cyclical dynamic as the "non-profit industrial complex." This happens because funding may be limited to services that focus on individual behavior change, like therapy, case management, and job training. These restrictions often fund addressing specific issues separately (such as partner violence, human trafficking, and early education) rather than creating holistic prevention and response strategies. This forces human trafficking victim services to be exceptionalized, siloed, and duplicative, rather than building on the collective expertise of established anti-violence and labor resources.[89] Often, access to housing, economic security, and food allows youth to make safe choices; framing youth behavior in terms of personal psychological pathology instead of access, safety, and basic needs diverts attention from changing systems.

Social services and healthcare providers are often trained to focus on identification of victims rather than ensuring that all clients or patients have access to resources that meet their material needs. If a survivor is identified, the services available may have existing barriers and may not reflect an understanding of the reality of labor exploitation. Victim services may have rules that replicate the power and control dynamics of abuse, particularly shelters; for example, curfews, three-strikes rules, mandatory service participation, blanket no-visitor rules, and mandatory sobriety. Some shelter programs may prioritize working with those most likely to "succeed" in their program in order to meet outcome measures set by funders rather than working with individuals based on needs.

One unique funding restriction in the U.S. that has significant impacts on anti-violence work is known as the "Anti-Prostitution Pledge." This refers to language in many anti-violence and public health funding streams, enacted in 2003, that requires grantees to "not promote or support the legalization or practice of prostitution."

Community and Institutional

It was enacted as a result of anti-trafficking narratives that conflate consensual and trafficked participation in the sex trades. **The anti-prostitution pledge is often used to discourage or prohibit activities that could help keep sex workers safer and could reduce their vulnerability to trafficking.** Because of this, several organizations forbid their staff (including survivors who are speaking about their lived experiences) from talking about meaningful options to create safety for those in the sex trades, which has led to two decades of anti-trafficking narratives, policies, and programs that are working against rather than in synergy with impacted workers.

Learn More:

[Disloyal to Feminism: Abuse of Survivors Within the Domestic Violence Shelter System](#)

[The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex](#)

[Should Social Movement Work Be Paid?](#)

"Everyone, whether an educator, a health care worker, or a domestic violence advocate is working in pseudo-corporate environments where the culture and organization of the market is increasingly encroaching on our lives. Instead of organizers, we have managers and bureaucrats, receptionists and clients. Instead of social change, we have service deliverables, and the vision that once drove our deep commitment to fighting violence against women has be replaced by outcomes." - Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo, The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

Community and Institutional

Opportunity: Transformative organizations

Invest in and build the capacity of comprehensive services that address intersecting forms of violence that are the root causes of human trafficking, and the competency of existing anti-violence organizations, anti-oppression programs, and labor services to also address trafficking. Some survivors may prefer to receive their services from these other kinds of organizations rather than within a trafficking-specific organization or framework, and access to options is important.

Instead of overemphasizing screening and identification, Focus efforts on assessing individual needs using a trauma-informed approach that creates the conditions for trust (and therefore possibly disclosure), like the CUES intervention and the PEARR Tool. Identification serves the needs of the provider while needs assessment serves the needs of the client. If a needs assessment uncovers a need that could be met through trafficking-specific funding or programs, you can let the client know you'd like to conduct a screening to see if they qualify for a specific support.

Remove requirements for human trafficking resources to only go to people who identify as a victim of human trafficking– primary prevention stops trafficking from happening in the first place. For example, support social services to adequately address material needs rather than primarily focusing on individual behavior change. Some anti-sex work activists have advocated for the expansion of the criminal definition of trafficking in the sex trades to remove the requirement of force, fraud, coercion, or minors. They have presented this as a way to expand needed services to people who might experience trafficking, but expanding the definition of "human trafficking" to secure this access inflates numbers and creates a false narrative about the prevalence and incidence of trafficking. In other fields of anti-violence work, it is not necessary to define someone as a "victim" in order to fund and secure preventive services and social supports. Prevention means giving needed supports, services, and social connection before trafficking has happened, and does not require redefining victimhood. Thus, a strong social safety net and competent, trauma-informed services across a broad variety of needs is trafficking prevention.

Community and Institutional

Restrictive nonprofit funding requirements also impact trafficking survivors who are seeking services. Not all survivors who fit the federal definition of human trafficking are aware that they do, and many who are aware may not feel that the definition or framing of "human trafficking" accurately reflects their experiences. They still deserve support and resources regardless of how they label their experiences.

Redesign organizations policies, procedures to center survivors material needs and experiences of trauma, **doing away with strict rules and policies that are pathologizing, infantilizing, and replicate patterns of power and control** while excluding the most marginalized survivors.

Ensure that your organization or health center has fair labor practices, pays [a living wage](), and is [trauma-informed for staff]().

[**Build partnerships**]() **between healthcare, anti-violence advocacy,** and community based organizations so that survivors are able to access the care and support they need. [Advocate for organizations to share their funding]() **and resources with community groups** and engage in community power building. For organizations focused specifically on exploitation, fund and partner with [sex worker outreach projects]() and [support organizations](). People in the sex trades are rarely invited to collaborate on responses to trafficking, yet are often already engaged in efforts to prevent exploitation, respond to violence, and support survivors. Many sex workers have also survived trafficking at different points in their lives and have expertise across the spectrum of choice in the sex trades.

Advocate for substance use harm reduction services, like syringe exchange services, PrEP, [safe consumption spaces](), and safer consumption and overdose prevention education. Examples of harm reduction in the sex trades include [COVID](), [Mpox](), and HIV considerations as well as access to sexual health services and safer sex supplies. Sex worker harm reduction organizers are weary of direct outreach and "harm reduction" being done by anti-trafficking organizations that do not fully understand the needs of sex workers or the fundamentals of harm reduction. Find out who is doing local substance use and sex worker harm reduction in your community.

Community and Institutional

Respect their wisdom and insight and find out how you can support their work, especially monetarily. Many sex worker harm reduction organizers view their work as violence prevention, and yet they are often excluded from anti-violence and public health resources, particularly compared to anti-trafficking organizations. Many harm reductionists have criticized public health approaches as relying on external, cultural, pre-determined definitions of what the desired outcome is.[90] This is an especially important when working with survivors of violence or other people from marginalized communities. For them, respect for their agency and bodily autonomy is a revolutionary, healing act that must be prioritized at least as highly as any other health outcomes.

In Practice:

[Working Principles for Health Justice and Racial Equity: Organizational Self-Assessment](#)

[Shelter Rules and Structure](#)

[Running a Shelter with Minimal Rules](#)

[Health Equity Tip: Establish Community Engagement Guidelines that Advance Power Sharing](#)

[Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds](#)

Learn More:

[Reframe Health and Justice](#)

[FreeFrom: Building a Sustainable Movement](#)

[Saving Our Own Lives: A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction](#)

[Towards Bodily Autonomy: A Healing Justice Anthology Decolonizing Sex Work & Drug Use](#)

Community and Institutional

Driver: Child welfare, foster care, and juvenile legal involvement

Family regulation systems are overly relied upon by healthcare and social service providers. Organizational policies frequently encourage mandatory reporters to err on the side of making a cautionary report, rather than exploring creative ways to support the person's or family's needs. Poverty is often equated with neglect, which has a disproportionate impact on families of color. Healthcare and education systems have biased and harmful mandatory reporting practices that inflate child welfare cases and removals. These removals have created lasting intergenerational trauma among Indigenous communities. The Sixties Scoop, which started in the 1950s and continued into the early 1990s, for example, saw thousands of Indigenous children stolen from their families by child welfare departments in Canada and adopted out to white families, including famlies in the U.S.[91] The impacts are devastating to this day. [Removals also disproportionately impact Black mothers and families, as well as migrant families](#).

The impact of removing children from their family and community often outweighs any benefits– a primary example being that foster care is a known risk factor for youth sexual exploitation.[92] A history of foster care placements is associated with an increased risk of youth running away from placement, and about one in six youth are identified as having experienced sexual exploitation after running from placement.[93] Research suggests youth who experienced sexual abuse and exploitation prior to foster care placement are more likely to run away from placement– and the risk of running away is more prevalent for youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth, often due to harassment, restrictive rules, and caregivers in placement settings.[94]

When youth run away either from their families or foster care, they lack basic resources to survive like housing, food, and gender-affirming care, and may have fewer supportive relationships.[95] This creates a situation where youth are forced to find ways to meet their material needs and may be more vulnerable to recruitment tactics used by third parties, such as offering housing, food, alcohol or drugs, and relational support.

Community and Institutional

Similarly, contact with the juvenile legal system– including mandatory social services– is positively associated with vulnerability to sexual exploitation and survival sex.[96,97] **Any contact with the juvenile legal system increases a youth's chances of future contact and subsequent criminalization within the criminal legal system.**[98] Strategies to address youth sexual exploitation have historically been punitive. Recent efforts to mandate restorative solutions through specialized trafficking courts over arrest and prosecution struggle to understand the unique needs of youth, address root causes of exploitation, and prevent future system involvement.[99]

While it is imperative to acknowledge the harms of removing children from their families (especially among marginalized populations), it is equally important to understand that the child welfare system harms children who are not removed or supported as well. While the impacts of removal are undeniably negative and further risk, family reunification is not always the best solution. Leaving a child in a dangerous, violent, or coercive situation is equally harmful to the child. We must ensure that out efforts to keep children from experiencing violence and abuse are not limited to either just removal or doing nothing, which highlights the importance of supporting families and communities.

People working in these systems face internal barriers to address systemic harm, like understaffing, laws that increase trauma, and regulations that compound harm. The system is often overwhelmed with unsubstantiated reports, reports targeting people in poverty, or politicized and abusive reports such as those mandated by recent anti-trans laws in some states. When this happens, staff don't have time to adequately support families that might actually benefit from appropriate kinds of support.

Learn More:

Examining the Link: Foster Care Runaway Episodes and Human Trafficking

Community and Institutional

Opportunity: Family + youth justice

Health and social service professionals can use their expertise to be part of the solution by reducing the harms of mandatory reporting laws. These laws can remove survivor autonomy, place children outside of their families and communities, and are enforced disproportionately against communities of color. "Mitigating unnecessary harm to families and preserving the provider's role as an authentic source of help is as important as the mandate to report."[100] Advocate for changes to definitions of neglect so that they are not synonymous with poverty.

Create mechanisms for children and youth to get support for abuse in ways that do not automatically get shared with family regulation/child welfare systems by fostering connections to trustworthy adults who can be resources outside of systems. Supported and connected communities hold the key to safety and healing for children. **Explore alternative ways to support children and families.** Some social workers and advocates are building out frameworks like mandated supporting, which focuses on providing families with resources and support.

Encourage agency for the child by being transparent with mandatory reporting information upfront. Some adults think it is better to not inform a minor about your reporting duty until you have gotten as much information as possible out of them for the report, but this can further erode the young person's trust in adults. Before the minor begins sharing details, let them know what you do and don't have to report. Some youth will then strategically share information in order to get the support and information they need without further disrupting a volatile situation. Others may feel more likely to disclose if they know something will be done with it. **Model trustworthiness by disclosing the limits of confidentiality when working with patients or clients.** This approach centers and respects the voices of the child. Children's voices get ignored in these situations, and they are often left out of the dialogue about decisions that affect their lives. By including them in the conversation and every step, advocates can increase respect, trust, and reduce harm.

Community and Institutional

Advocate for programs that support the economic security **of** young people in the foster care system. Child welfare agencies can prioritize "family-based placements rather than group and residential care…[and involve] youth in placement decisions."[101] When a youth returns to placement after running away, it is essential to elicit their ideas bout how to make placement safer.

Decrease young peoples' contact with the criminal legal system by removing police from schools, supporting the closing of youth prisons and immigration detention centers, and promoting in-community restorative justice programs.

Support and prioritize youth-led organizing efforts, youth power building, and opportunities for peer support.

In Practice:

Promising Futures: Envisioning a world free of violence, where all children and families have everything they need to thrive

Moving from Why to How: Parent Leaders' Perspectives on the Movement for Child Welfare Justice

Reports are Not Support: Mandatory Reporting Harm Reduction

Ending Child Sexual Abuse: A Transformative Justice Handbook

Learn More:

Expand the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)

Just Beginnings Collaborative

Trust Kids! Stories on Youth Autonomy and Confronting Adult Supremacy

JMac for Families

Illinois Caucus For Adolescent Youth

PointSourceYouth.org

Young Women's Empowement Project

Young Women's Freedom Center

Interpersonal and Individual

Driver: Isolation and harmful relationship dynamics

When policy failures present on an individual and interpersonal level, people are left without options to thrive and are targeted by individuals who exploit vulnerability for personal gain. Sometimes, third-party exploiters or others engaged in a person's trafficking are in that survivor's family or community, which may further cut off the survivor's access to leaving or finding support. Family, caregiver, and intimate partner abuse in all forms can lead to people being forced to leave their homes and community without a safety net. Economic insecurity among individuals, families, and communities is a condition that prevents the stability needed to create protective environments in which trafficking does not occur.

Stigma against drug use, mental illness, disabilities, poverty, sex work, and aspects of identity– such as being two-spirit or LGBTQ+– shows up in interpersonal relationships and creates risk factors for victimization. A common example of this is parents and caregivers pushing youth out of the home after they come out as queer, transgender, and/or nonbinary. One's identity is not what creates the risk for isolation or exploitation, but rather the social stigma through removing their resources and access to support. Similarly, individuals have lost jobs or custody of their children over consensual engagement in the sex trades, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation or coercive power dynamics. In this case as well, it is the stigma that creates the vulnerability rather than the form of labor done.

Youth in the sex trades report high levels of childhood emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and are twice as likely as adults in the sex trade to be part of a racialized group.[102] Research has identified the following common individual and interpersonal factors associated with young people entering the sex trades as a means of survival:

- Family rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity
- Lack of access to services and opportunities and inadequate service providers
- A history of arrest for "quality of life" crimes such as loitering
- Exposure to violence
- Difficulty obtaining regular and legal employment while housing insecure.[103]

Interpersonal and Individual

Many young adults also reported escaping their third-party trafficking situations and going back to the sex trades independently for survival sex.[104] These individuals are just as deserving of care, safety, and self-determination as others.

Similarly, isolation and harmful relationship dynamics impact survivors' experiences of trafficking in other forms of labor in the U.S. as well. Language and cultural differences can leave people vulnerable through lack of access to connection and community support. This vulnerability is made worse when independent translation and interpretation are not provided and they are forced to rely on a family member, or even their trafficker, for language access. Confusion or misrepresentation about immigration laws or labor rights can be utilized by traffickers as part of the coercion. Lack of family or community support can be leveraged as part of the coercion in trafficking into non-sexual criminalized economies.

Learn More:

[The Economic Drivers and Consequences of Sex Trafficking in the United States](#)

[Respect to Connect: Undoing Stigma](#)

[Risk and Protective Factors for Sexual Violence Perpetration](#)

"Sometimes we don't understand why people make certain choices or make choices we would not. This difficulty understanding a person's motivation can lead us to judge, shame, and exclude them, which are two major components of stigma. We defeat stigma when we engage in "caring curiosity" — where, instead of judging or letting fear of others drive our actions, we ask genuine questions which are rooted in respect, kindness, and the honest desire to support." - Harm Reduction Coalition

Interpersonal and Individual

Opportunity: Connection and care

Healthcare and social service providers should listen to the concerns and needs of patients and clients. his may sound simple but is often overlooked because the provider has a mental script that makes them think they already know what the patient/client needs. Many competent providers who respect people-centered care may shift into rescue narratives when they suspect human trafficking, forgetting that the values of nonjudgmental, people-centered care still apply. Similarly, anti-violence advocates who value survivor autonomy and empowerment may inadvertently shift into coercive or stigma-replicating dynamics when they suspect human trafficking. The reality is that not everyone in the sex trades is seeking sexual health education when they make a medical appointment, and it may be alienating to be labeled as "victims" by their provider when that label does not fit their experience.

Do not assume you know what anyone's concerns or needs are before they tell you. This includes being careful to avoid [medical and institutional fatphobia](#) that has historically targeted and alienated Black and Indigenous survivors, in favor of weight-neutral approaches that focus on overall health. It also includes cultural humility and recognition of non-Western and Indigenous approaches to holistic healthcare, including for mental health.

People in the sex trades themselves are criminalized and accused of "recruiting" their peers by offering mentorship and advice for surviving in the sex trades and reducing the likelihood of harm through peer support networks.[105] It is important for providers to ask patients and clients about their experiences with peers and how they felt about those relationships before reaching conclusions about who is a victim, who is a criminal, and who is trying to survive. Legality does not equal morality, and criminalized behaviors do not always equal abuse or exploitation.

Promoting Protective Factors:

⇨   Offer universal education to people about health, wellness, and supportive services without forcing people to share their stories in order to get help. If they do disclose, ask them what they need and how you can help them get connected to the appropriate support–they may not need a referral to trafficking-specific services.

Interpersonal and Individual

⇨ Build networks with supportive services in order to offer warm referrals and options for empowerment, healing, and support that is aligned with what patients/clients have communicated they need.

⇨ Ensure people get seen alone for part of the visit so providers can discuss healthy relationships and abuse without others present.

⇨ Providers can offer ongoing universal education to young people and parents about healthy sexuality, sexual decision-making, consent, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity to fight stigma and encourage patients to practice identifying and naming their own personal boundaries in relationships.

⇨ Use independent and qualified interpreters, rather than relying on a partner, family member, or friend.

⇨ Hang up LGBTQ+ affirming posters/materials around the health center or office to create an affirming environment.

⇨ Meaningfully involve people with lived experience in the sex trades, as well as workers from other informal or precarious forms of labor, in program development and planning and compensate them for their time and expertise.

⇨ Affirm people's strengths, dreams, communities, and identities by ensuring there is representation on your staff and programming. Maintain a learner's mindset, and always seek ways to grow your work with the people who are most impacted by it.

⇨ Support community-building and connection among patients and clients where possible and foster civic engagement, political education, and power-building with organizational resources.

In Practice:

CUES Intervention for Addressing IPV, SV, and Exploitation

LGBTQIA+ Youth and Experiences of Human Trafficking: A Healing-Centered Approach

PEARR Tool for Addressing Violence and Exploitation

Full Frame Initiative Wellbeing Planning Toolkit

Guiding Principles to Inform Economic Empowerment Programing for Survivors of Human Trafficking

National Survivors Network

Risk and Protective Factors

The work of primary prevention is to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors. Interpersonal and individual drivers of human trafficking increase risk for human trafficking, and the opportunities described offer protection against it occurring. These factors are not predictive, but rather patterns in available research that were more present for people who experienced exploitation and trafficking. These drivers are influenced by societal and community level (or "outer-layer") factors, which create conditions that can layer risks upon each other.

For example, families that do not have meaningful access to mental health support due to lack of insurance and availability of free and sliding scale services (community), may find it challenging for a family member with mental illness to maintain steady employment (interpersonal). If this is a person of color, the impact on the family and their ability to access mental health resources may be compounded by the ways racism has inhibited their access to wealth and resources through discriminatory policy making, such as redlining (societal). This creates conditions in which people's vulnerabilities can be exploited by traffickers as part of a dynamic of force, fraud or coercion. It also creates the conditions in which people engage in work by circumstance (as opposed to both consensual choice or the coercion of trafficking) as a way to provide for their family and/or needs. This is reflected by the sentiment, "I would leave this work if I had better options," and this is the situation in which many people in the United States find themselves.

Be aware of how focusing on individual-level "risk factors" can be pathologizing, might feel like prescribing future trauma, or can even lead to "pre-emptive" criminal legal responses. For example, "exposure to community violence" does not guarantee future perpetration or experience of violence. It does not give useful information of the character of the people living in the community. It also does not acknowledge the policy failures and political violence that systematically deprived these communities of access to resources and safety. It is simply acknowledging a statistical correlation (not causation) between exposure to community violence and increased risk for violence. Risk is typically created by systemic failures rather than individual shortcomings. When we think about individual risk factors, we must always connect them back to the larger systems and policies that create those conditions.

Equally important are protective factors: when an individual has strong relationships and feelings of belonging in a community

help meet material and relational needs (community). Policy has the capacity to change social norms; if policies are in place that ensure all communities have the resources they need to provide for individuals and families (institutional), then cultural norms around community care will be affirmed and normalized (societal). For example, when Medicare coverage was added to the Social Security Act in 1965, it was seen by some as an unnecessary "government handout," but today it is more widely viewed as a necessary subsidy for supporting older adults.

Similar health policies have contributed to social norms change that promote community care, such as widespread seat belt and helmet use, access to safer drug use supplies, and vaccinations against communicable diseases among children. Health policy has a long way to go before health equity becomes a reality; however, great strides have been made and are highlighted throughout this document.

Conclusion

The public health and community-centered approaches to human trafficking prevention proposed address the root causes of intersecting forms of violence. Advocating for these multi-level interventions and opportunities is a way to engage in the intersectional work needed to promote healthy communities overall. This cannot happen solely on an individual level because ending violence and exploitation is dependent on changing societal norms and institutions that perpetuate inequitable access to resources and discriminatory barriers to thriving.

The approaches presented encourage primary prevention of all forms of exploitation by advocating for policies and systems changes that promote economic stability, health justice, increased pathways to citizenship, and safe and affordable housing. Healthcare providers, public health practitioners, and anti-violence advocates can leverage the weight of their professions to impact real change while recognizing and supporting the needs of individuals who have experienced exlpoitation, regardless of where they identify on the spectrum of agency.

This work cannot be done in isolation. The call to shift the dominant anti-trafficking approach from focusing on individuals and criminalization to transforming systems and root causes takes patience, community power-building, a focus on harm reduction, and redistribution of resources.

Ways for Health and Public Health to Take Action
Adapted from Human Impact Partners (HIP) report, Health Equity Now

Use your expertise to speak out[106]

- Write an op-ed, letter to the editor, or blog post using your expertise and making the connections between labor exploitation, violence, and health. In your letters, remember to center people that have lived experience of labor exploitation.
- Call or email your members of Congress or local elected officials to express your support for proposed policies that advance social and racial justice and public health and human rights approaches to labor exploitation or abuse of minors.

Educate your public health community

- Share this resource and others with your public health colleagues.
- Find opportunities in your professional communities (your workplace, listservs, social media, etc.) to share health equity policy demands, resources, and actions that move away from criminalization and other individual-level interventions.

Take action locally

- Advocate for passing strong local and state policies on these issues while also pushing for them at a federal level.
- Ensure that local policies both address short-term needs and create long-term, sustainable, and equitable solutions.
- Understand how governmental public health can leverage its legal authority to make demands regarding COVID-19 response and recovery that considers and supports people in the sex trade or other forms of labor.
- Support budget campaigns to invest in community health and divest from systems of harm.

Join networks dedicated to systemic and social change

Public Health Awakened is an example of a national network of public health professionals organizing for health, equity, and justice.

The Soar Collective is mobilizing to create advocate communities using an anti-racism and anti-oppression lens

Ways for Health and Public Health to Take Action
Adapted from Human Impact Partners (HIP) report, Health Equity Now

Connect with local organizations working on the issues you care most about — go to a meeting, get on the email list, connect with a member, or show up at an action. There have been many pop-up organizations created to address trafficking over recent years. Some questions you might consider when vetting organizations to support their work may include:

- Does this organization have representation from or accountability to a diverse array of people with lived experience of human trafficking or worker organizing (including sex workers and advocates for migrant rights)?
- Does this organization advocate for laws and policies that negatively impact the safety and autonomy of survivors of human trafficking and people in the sex trades? (e.g., advocating for increased criminalization)
- Does this organization use terminology and language that further stigmatizes or sensationalizes human trafficking survivors, the sex trades, migrants, or others in precarious forms of labor to further their work? (e.g., using "rescue" or "restore" language instead of a voluntary service approach, "modern-day slavery" to refer to all instances of trafficking, or defining all sex workers as victims of trafficking)

Follow, support, and partner with organizations led by people in the sex trades

- SWOP USA
- Red Canary Song
- Global Network of Sex Work Projects
- Red Umbrella Fund
- SWOP Behind Bars

Follow, support, and partner with explicitly sex-positive, survivor led, anti-trafficking and child sexual abuse (CSA) organizations
- National Survivor Network
- The Heal Project
- Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women
- Mirror Memoirs

References

1	Veto Violence: Connecting the Dots. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/connecting-the-dots/node/5. Accessed 1.7.2023.

2	While these are the levels used by the CDC for these specific risk and protective factors, each level of risk or protection influences the others. For example, people living in environments where violent conflict resolution is normalized (such as domestic or community violence, which are relationship and community level factors) are statistically more likely to witness violence, which is an individual level factor.

3	National Survivor Network values. https://nationalsurvivornetwork.org/values/ February 2022.

4	Health justice means: "Achieving health justice means digging up the common roots of these injustices — including racism, classism, and sexism— and making sure our policies are oriented toward an equitable opportunity for health for all." - Center for Health Justice

5	Zimmerman C, Kiss L. Human trafficking and exploitation: A global health concern. PLoS medicine, 14(11), e1002437. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002437

6	Fernández-Esquer ME, Ibekwe LN, Guerrero-Luera R, King YA, Durand CP, Atkinson JS. Structural Racism and Immigrant Health: Exploring the Association Between Wage Theft, Mental Health, and Injury among Latino Day Laborers. Ethn Dis. 2021 May 20;31(Suppl 1):345-356. doi: 10.18865/ed.31.S1.345. PMID: 34045836; PMCID: PMC8143848.

7	Hemmings S, Jakobowitz S, Abas M, et al. Responding to the health needs of survivors of human trafficking: a systematic review. BMC Health Serv Res 16, 320. 2016. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1538-8

8	Albright E, d'Adamo K. Decreasing Human Trafficking through Sex Work Decriminalization. AMA Journal of Ethics, 19(1), 122–126. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2017.19.1.sect2-1701

9	Croft C. Human Trafficking Prevention Toolkit, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Raleigh, NC. 2020.

10	Peters A. Responding to Human Trafficking: Sex, Gender, and Culture in the Law, 122(1): 233-234. 2015. https://doi.org/10.1177/0141778919848774.

11	Stoklosa H, Ash C. 'It has to be their choice. We need to give them options.' Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, 26(4), 221–223. 2021. https://doi.org/10.1177/13558196211034898

12	Quirk J. 2020, December 15. Are You Better or Worse Off? Understanding Exploitation through Comparison. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/are-you-better-or-worse-understanding-exploitation-through-comparison/. Accessed August 22, 2022.

13	Ditmore M, Thukral J. Accountability and the Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking. Anti-Trafficking Review, 1, Article 1. 2012. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218

14	Ditmore M, Thukral J. Accountability and the Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking. Anti-Trafficking Review, 1, Article 1. 2012. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218

15	Ditmore M, Thukral J. Accountability and the Use of Raids to Fight Trafficking. Anti-Trafficking Review, 1, Article 1. 2012. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201218

16	OVC FY 2022 Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to combat human trafficking: OVC. (2022, April). Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://ovc.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/o-ovc-2022-171264

17	Is Sex Work Decriminalization the Answer? What the Research Tells Us | American Civil Liberties Union. 2020. Retrieved April 17, 2021, from https://www.aclu.org/report/sex-work-decriminalization-answer-what-research-tells-us

18	Blunt D, Wolf A. Erased: The Impact of FOSTA-SESTA and the Removal of Backpage. Hacking//Hustling, 2020. https://hackinghustling.org/erased-theimpact-of-fosta-sesta-2020/

See also: Blunt, Danielle, and Ariel Wolf. "Erased: The Impact of FOSTA-SESTA and the Removal of Backpage on Sex Workers." Anti-Trafficking Review, 14 (2020): 117-121.

19   Chapman-Schmidt B. 'Sex Trafficking' as Epistemic Violence. Anti-Trafficking Review, 12, 172–187. 2019. https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.2012191211

20   Is Sex Work Decriminalization the Answer? What the Research Tells Us | American Civil Liberties Union. (2020). Retrieved April 17, 2021, from https://www.aclu.org/report/sex-work-decriminalization-answer-what-research-tells-us

21   U.S. Department of Justice. Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department. U.S. Department of Justice, 2016. https://www.justice.gov/crt/file/883296/download.

22   Footer K, Park JN, Allen ST, Decker MR, Silberzahn BE, Huettner S, Galai N, Sherman SG. Police-Related Correlates of Client-Perpetrated Violence Among Female Sex Workers in Baltimore City, Maryland. American journal of public health, 109(2), 289–295. 2019. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304809

23   Footer K, Park JN, Allen ST, Decker MR, Silberzahn BE, Huettner S, Galai N, Sherman SG. Police-Related Correlates of Client-Perpetrated Violence Among Female Sex Workers in Baltimore City, Maryland. American journal of public health, 109(2), 289–295. 2019. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304809

24   Halter S. Factors That Influence Police Conceptualizations of Girls Involved in Prostitution in Six U.S. Cities: Child Sexual Exploitation Victims or Delinquents?. Child Maltreatment 15 (2): 152–60. 2010. doi:10.1177/1077559509355315.

25   Bocinski SG. The Economic Drivers and Consequences of Sex Trafficking in the United States. IWPR 2020. (2017, September 27). https://iwpr.org/iwpr-publications/briefing-paper/the-economic-drivers-and-consequences-of-sex-trafficking-in-the-united-states/

26   Finigan-Carr N, Johnson M, Pullman M, Stewart C, Fromknecht A. A Traumagenic Social Ecological Framework for Understanding and Intervening with Sex Trafficked Children and Youth. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. 2018.

27   Hacking//Hustling. Sex workers use the internet as a harm reduction tool. Accessed 17 August 2022. https://hackinghustling.org/online-platforms-sex-worker-discrimination/

28   Lippy C, Jumarali SN, Nnawulezi NA, et al. The Impact of Mandatory Reporting Laws on Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: Intersectionality, Help-Seeking and the Need for Change. J Fam Viol 35, 255–267 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00103-w

29   Un-Meetable Promises: Rhetoric and Reality in New York City's Human Trafficking Intervention Courts. Global Health Justice Partnership of the Yale Law School and Yale School of Public Health, The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/global_health_justice/un-meetable_promises_htic_report_ghjp_2018rev.pdf

30   Gruber A, Cohen A, Mogulescu K. Penal Welfare and the New Human Trafficking Intervention Courts. Florida Law Review. 2017.

31   Kendis B. Human T Human Trafficking and Prostitution Courts: Problem Solving or Problematic? Case Western Law Review Vol 6, Issue 3, Article 10. 2019

32   Un-Meetable Promises: Rhetoric and Reality in New York City's Human Trafficking Intervention Courts. Global Health Justice Partnership of the Yale Law School and Yale School of Public Health, The Sex Workers Project of the Urban Justice Center https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/global_health_justice/un-meetable_promises_htic_report_ghjp_2018rev.pdf

33   McMahon-Howard J, Muftic LR. Youth involved in prostitution (YIP): Exploring possible changes in interactions with police and social service agencies and narratives of victimization. Criminal Justice Review, 42, 119–145. 2017.

34   Gezinski LB. (De)criminalization of Survivors of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Social

Work Call to Action. Soc Work. 2021 Jul 21;66(3):236-244. doi: 10.1093/sw/swab015. PMID: 34148091.

35   Swaner R, Labriola M, Rempel M, Walker A, Spadafore J. Youth involvement in the sex trade: A national study. Center for Court Innovation; 2016.

36   International Women's Human Rights Clinic. Criminalization of Trafficking Victims (Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America) [Stakeholder Report]. City University of New York Law School. 2015. https://www.law.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/page-assets/academics/clinics/hrgj/publications/Criminalization-of-Trafficking-Victims.pdf

37   Judicial Council of California, Center for Families, Children, and the Courts. Human Trafficking in California: Toolkit for Judicial Officers. San Francisco, CA. Judicial Council of California. 2017.

38   Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. Widening the Net in Juvenile Justice and the Dangers of Prevention and Early Intervention. Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. 2001. http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/widening.pdf

39   Impact Justice A Diversion Toolkit for Communities. Restorative Justice Project. Washington D.C. 2020.

40   Marcus A, Hornig A, Curtis R, Sanson J, Thompson E. Conflict and agency among sex workers and pimps: A closer look at domestic minor sex trafficking. ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 653, pg. 242. 2014.

41   Gibbs DA, Walters JLH, Lutnick A, Miller S, Kluckman M. Services to domestic minor victims of sex trafficking: Opportunities for engagement and support. Children & Youth Services Review, 54, 1–7. 2015.

42   Swaner R, Labriola M, Rempel M, Walker A, Spadafore J. Youth involvement in the sex trade: A national study. Center for Court Innovation; 2016.

43   Xian K, Chock S, Dwiggins D. LGBTQ Youth and Vulnerability to Sex Trafficking. In: Chisolm-Straker M, Stoklosa H. (eds) Human Trafficking Is a Public Health Issue. Springer, Cham., 146. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47824-1_9

44   Global Estimates of Modern Slavery Forced Labour and Forced Marriage. International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and International Organization for Migration (IOM), Geneva, 2022.https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf

45   Caroline J, Pei Ying NT, Gillian W. Disability and the Risk of Vulnerability to Human Trafficking: An Analysis of Case Law, Journal of Human Trafficking. 2022. DOI: 10.1080/23322705.2022.2111507

46   Twigg J, Kett M, Bottomley H, Tan LT, Nasreddin H. Disability and public shelter in emergencies, Environmental Hazards, 10:3-4, 248-261. 2011. DOI:10.1080/17477891.2011.594 492

47   JTwigg J, Kett M, Bottomley H, Tan LT, Nasreddin H. Disability and public shelter in emergencies, Environmental Hazards, 10:3-4, 248-261. 2011. DOI:10.1080/17477891.2011.594 492

48   Altiraifi A. Advancing Economic Security for People With Disabilities. Center for American Progress. July 2019. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/advancing-economic-security-people-disabilities/

49   Colonialism. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/ Accessed August 17th, 2022.

50   https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism

51   Illicit Massage Parlors in Los Angeles County and New York City: Stories from Women Workers. Red Canary Song, Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Worker's Support Network, Massage Parlor Outreach Project, Bowen Public Affairs, Brown University Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice. 2022. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e4835857fcd934d19bd9673/t/6218d9316e93a74b051c9f00/1645795656006/2022_Un-

Licensed.pdf Retrieved August 31, 2022.

52   Illicit Massage Parlors in Los Angeles County and New York City: Stories from Women Workers. Red Canary Song, Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Worker's Support Network, Massage Parlor Outreach Project, Bowen Public Affairs, Brown University Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice. 2022. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e4835857fcd934d19bd9673/t/6218d9316e93a74b051c9f00/1645795656006/2022_Un-Licensed.pdf Retrieved August 31, 2022

53   Epstein R, Blake JJ, Gonzalez T. Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood. Center on Poverty and Inequality at Georgetown Law. 2020. https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf, Accessed August 31, 2022.

54   Phillips J. Black Girls and the (Im)Possibilities of a Victim Trope: The Intersectional Failures of Legal and Advocacy Interventions in the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Minors in the United States. UCLA Law Review. 62 UCLA L. Rev. 1642 (2015). https://www.uclalawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Phillips-final_8.15.pdf

55   Williamson KG, Marcus A. Black Pimps Matter: Racially Selective Identification and Prosecution of Sex Trafficking in the United States. In: Horning, A., Marcus, A. (eds) Third Party Sex Work and Pimps in the Age of Anti-trafficking. Springer, Cham. 2017.https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50305-9_9.

56   Thoma BC, Rezeppa TL, Choukas-Bradley S, Salk RH, Marshal MP. Disparities in Childhood Abuse Between Transgender and Cisgender Adolescents. Pediatrics. 2021 Aug;148(2):e2020016907. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-016907. Epub 2021 Jul 5. PMID: 34226247; PMCID: PMC8344346.

57   Nadal KL, Davidoff KC, Fujii-Doe W. Transgender women and the sex work industry: roots in systemic, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination. J Trauma Dissociation. 2014;15(2):169-83. doi: 10.1080/15299732.2014.867572. PMID: 24313294.

58   2015 US Transgender Survey for more data on disparities. https://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports Accessed August 31, 2022.

59   Swaner R, Labriola M, Rempel M, Walker A, Spadafore J. Youth involvement in the sex trade: A national study. Center for Court Innovation; 2016.

60   Fehrenbacher AE, Musto J, Hoefinger H, Mai N, Macioti PG, Giametta C, Bennachie C. Transgender People and Human Trafficking: Intersectional Exclusion of Transgender Migrants and People of Color from Antitrafficking Protection in the United States, Journal of Human Trafficking, 6:2, 182-194, 2020. DOI:10.1080/23322705.2020.1690116

61   Eshet D. Killing the Indian in the child. Facing History and Ourselves 2015. Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://www.facinghistory.org/stolen-lives-indigenous-peoples-canada-and-indian-residential-schools/chapter-3/killing-indian-child

62   Walker M. (2022, May 11). Report Catalogs Abuse of Native American Children at Former Government Schools (N., Ed.). Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/11/us/politics/native-american-children-schools-abuse.html

63   Brewer GL. (2022, May 11). U.S. counts Indian boarding school deaths for first time but leaves key questions unanswered (N., Ed.). Retrieved August 22, 2022.

64   Honderich H. (2021, July 15). Why Canada is Mourning the Deaths of Hundreds of Children (B., Ed.). Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57325653

65   Schiedel May 15, B. (2020, May 15). Why Our Kids Need to Learn about Residential Schools (T., Ed.). Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://www.todaysparent.com/kids/school-age/why-our-kids-need-to-learn-about-residential-schools/

66   Butler CN. The Racial Roots of Human Trafficking. UCLA Law Review. 2015. https://www.uclalawreview.org/racial-roots-human-trafficking/

67   Calling an Awareness to Action: Examining the Intersection of Stalking, Trafficking, and the MMIW Crisis Facing Alaska Natives. Alaska Indigenous Womens Resource Network.

February 8th, 2022 Webinar. https://www.aknwrc.org/calling-an-awareness-to-action-examining-the-intersection-of-stalking-trafficking-and-the-mmiw-crisis-facing-alaska-natives/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=calling-an-awareness-to-action-examining-the-intersection-of-stalking-trafficking-and-the-mmiw-crisis-facing-alaska-natives

68   Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_854733/lang--en/index.htm

69   Nonomura R. Trafficking at the Intersections: Racism, Colonialism, Sexism, and Exploitation in Canada. Learning Network Brief (36). London, Ontario: Learning Network, Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. ISBN: 978-1-988412-37-5. 2020. https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/briefs/briefpdfs/Brief-361.pdf

70   Polaris Analysis of 2020 Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline. Accessed August 17th 2022. https://polarisproject.org/2020-us-national-human-trafficking-hotline-statistics/

71   How Migration is A Gender Equity Issue Interactive Report. Accessed August 17th 2022. https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/migration/en/index.html

72   How Migration is A Gender Equity Issue Interactive Report. Accessed August 17th 2022 https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explainer/migration/en/index.html

73   Riley ED, Vittinghoff E, Kagawa RMC, Raven MC, Eagen KV, Cohee A, Dilworth SE, Shumway M. Violence and Emergency Department Use among Community-Recruited Women Who Experience Homelessness and Housing Instability. J Urban Health. 2020 Feb;97(1):78-87. doi: 10.1007/s11524-019-00404-x. PMID: 31907705; PMCID: PMC7010900.

74   The International Labor Organization includes forced marriage in its "modern slavery" statistics, which is more than twice as common in women than men. However, this definition is not included in most definitions of human trafficking, and the statistics for all forms of forced labor show higher prevalence among men. Forced marriage is a gross violation of human rights, but typically has different dynamics than human trafficking and forced labor. See: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/publications/WCMS_854733/lang--en/index.htm

75   https://blackfeministfuture.org/resources/what-is-patriarchal-violence-a-working-definition-from-the-abolishing-patriarchal-violence-innovation-lab/

76   International Women's Human Rights Clinic. (2015). Criminalization of Trafficking Victims (Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review of the United States of America) [Stakeholder Report]. City University of New York Law School. https://www.law.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/page-assets/academics/clinics/hrgj/publications/Criminalization-of-Trafficking-Victims.pdf

77   U Visa Filing Trends. (2019). [U Visa Report]. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

78   Finigan-Carr N, Johnson M, Pullman M, Stewart C, Fromknecht A. A Traumagenic Social Ecological Framework for Understanding and Intervening with Sex Trafficked Children and Youth. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. 2018.

79   Finigan-Carr N, Johnson M, Pullman M, Stewart C, Fromknecht A. A Traumagenic Social Ecological Framework for Understanding and Intervening with Sex Trafficked Children and Youth. Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. 2018.

80   D'Adamo K. Attacking Demand, Escalating Violence: The Impact of Twenty Years of End Demand Implementation on People Who Trade Sex. Reframe Health and Justice. 2021. Also, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9NKwXqBVlMAWGnwcQo5X5kFbWMyRNRs/view

81   D'Adamo K. Attacking Demand, Escalating Violence: The Impact of Twenty Years of End Demand Implementation on People Who Trade Sex. Reframe Health and Justice. 2021. Also, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9NKwXqBVlMAWGnwcQo5X5kFbWMyRNRs/view

82   D'Adamo K. Attacking Demand, Escalating Violence: The Impact of Twenty Years of End Demand Implementation on People Who Trade Sex. Reframe Health and Justice. 2021. Also, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9NKwXqBVlMAWGnwcQo5X5kFbWMyRNRs/view

83   The Impact of "End Demand" Legislation on Women Sex Workers Policy Brief. Global

Network of Sex Work Projects. 2018. https://www.nswp.org/sites/default/files/pb_impact_of_end_demand_on_women_sws_nswp_-_2018.pdf

84   This is What Minimum Wage Would Be If It Kept Pace with Productivity. (2020). Center for Economic and Policy Research. https://cepr.net/this-is-what-minimumwage- would-be-if-it-kept-pace-with-productivity/

85   Quirk J. Are you better or worse off? Understanding exploitation through comparison. openDemocracy. 2020. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/are-you-better-or-worse-understanding-exploitation-through-comparison/

86   Albright E, D'Adamo K. Decreasing Human Trafficking through Sex Work Decriminalization. AMA Journal of Ethics, 19(1), 122–126. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1001/journal ofethics.2017.19.1.sect2-1701

87.   Levin J. An Antipoverty Agenda for Public Health: Background and Recommendations. Public Health Reports, 132(4), 431–435. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354917708990

88.   Levin J. An Antipoverty Agenda for Public Health: Background and Recommendations. Public Health Reports, 132(4), 431–435. 2017. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354917708990

89   For example, youth in the sex trades are most frequently looking for resources for housing, economic security, and food; in one study, only 16% of youth in the sex trades were requesting counseling

90   Hassan S. Saving Our Own Lives: A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), 159.

91   Walker C. (n.d.). Home | finding cleo | CBC Radio (C., Ed.). Retrieved August 22, 2022. https://www.cbc.ca/radio/findingcleo

92   Latzman NE, Gibbs D. Examining the link: Foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking. OPRE Report No. 2020-143. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2020.

93   Latzman NE, Gibbs D. Examining the link: Foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking. OPRE Report No. 2020-143. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2020.

94   Latzman NE, Gibbs D. Examining the link: Foster care runaway episodes and human trafficking. OPRE Report No. 2020-143. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2020..

95   Gibbs DA, Feinberg RK, Dolan MM, Latzman NE, MisraS, Domanico RA. Report to Congress: The child welfare system response to sex trafficking of children. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2019. Retrieved May 18, 2020, from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/report-congress-child-welfare-system-response-sex-trafficking-children

96   Cook MC, Talbert RD, Thomas B. A longitudinal study of justice characteristics among girls participating in a sex trafficking court program. Health & Justice, 9(1), 1. 2021. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-020-00127-1

97   Gezinski LB. (De)criminalization of Survivors of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Social Work Call to Action. Soc Work. 2021 Jul 21;66(3):236-244. doi: 10.1093/sw/swab015. PMID: 34148091.

98   Mowen TJ, Brent JJ, Bares KJ. How Arrest Impacts Delinquency Over Time Between and Within Individuals. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice. 2018;16(4):358-377. doi:10.1177/1541204017712560

99   Mowen TJ, Brent JJ, Bares KJ. How Arrest Impacts Delinquency Over Time Between and Within Individuals. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice. 2018;16(4):358-377. doi:10.1177/1541204017712560

100   Promising Futures: Mandatory Reporting. https://promising.futureswithoutviolence.org/mandatory-reporting/programpractices/child-abuse-mandatory-reporting

101   ibbs DA, Feinberg RK, Dolan MM, Latzman NE, MisraS, Domanico RA. Report to Congress: The child welfare system response to sex trafficking of children. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2019. Retrieved May 18, 2020, from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/report-congress-child-welfare-system-response-sex-trafficking-children

102   Gezinski LB. (De)criminalization of Survivors of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Social Work Call to Action. Soc Work. 2021 Jul 21;66(3):236-244. doi: 10.1093/sw/swab015. PMID: 34148091.

103.   Gezinski LB. (De)criminalization of Survivors of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Social Work Call to Action. Soc Work. 2021 Jul 21;66(3):236-244. doi: 10.1093/sw/swab015. PMID: 34148091.

104   Bigelsen J, Vuotto S. Homelessness, survival sex and human trafficking: As experienced by the youth of Covenant House New York. 2013. New York: Covenant House.

105   Gezinski LB. (De)criminalization of Survivors of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking: A Social Work Call to Action. Soc Work. 2021 Jul 21;66(3):236-244. doi: 10.1093/sw/swab015. PMID: 34148091.

106   Federal Policy Platform for Health Equity Now. (2021). Human Impact Partners. Retrieved August 18, 2021, from https://humanimpact.org/hip-advocacy/health-equity-now-platform/